CHRISTOPHER GRAVETT

THE MEDIEVAL KNIGHT

OSPREY

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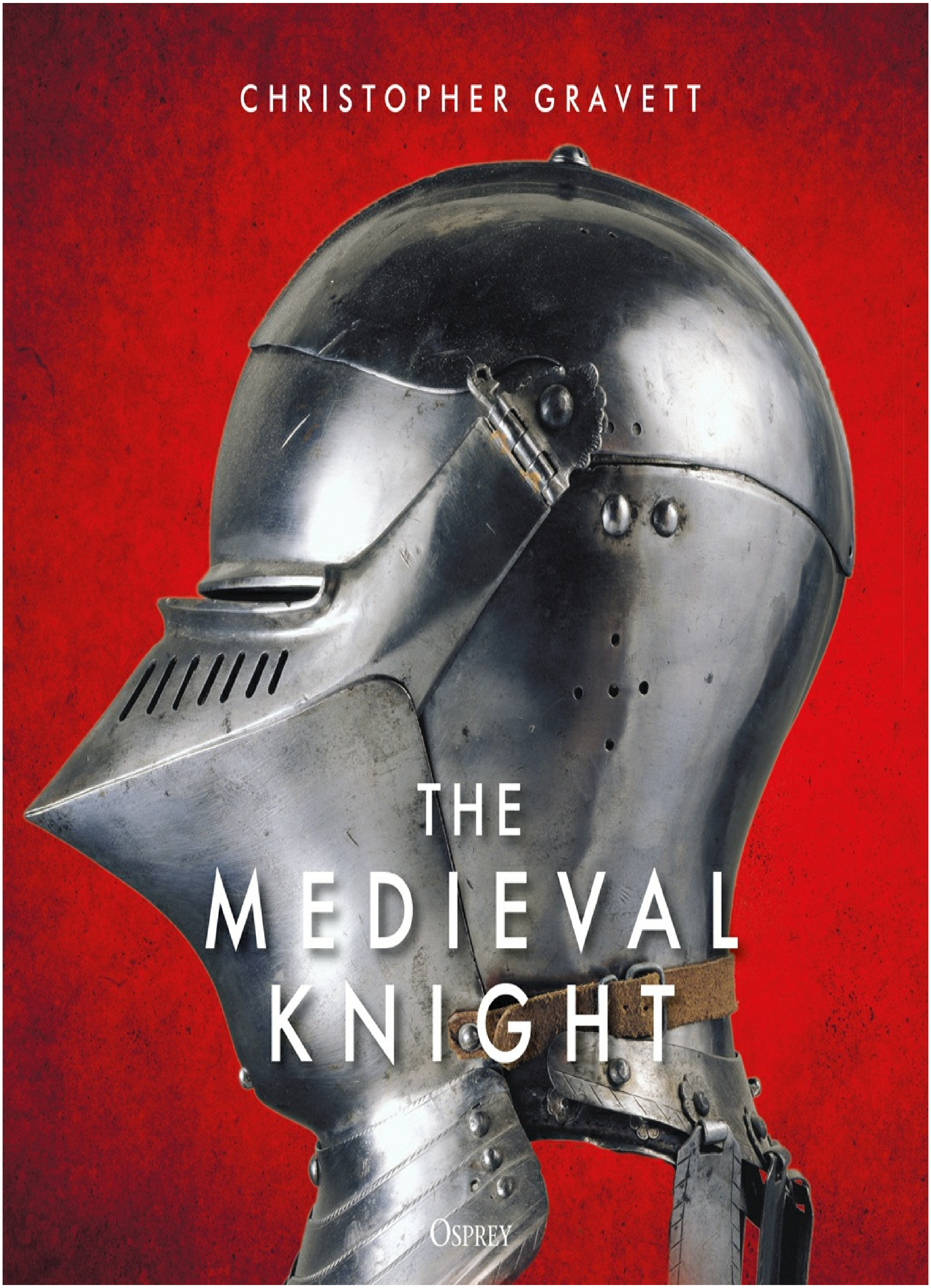

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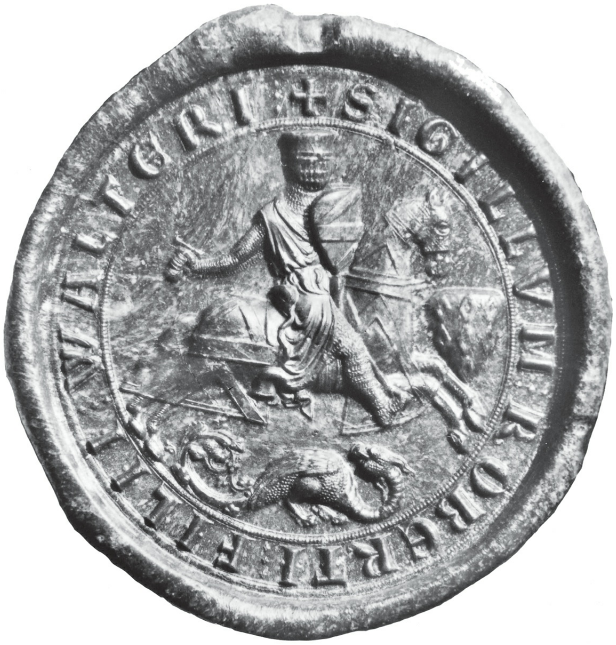
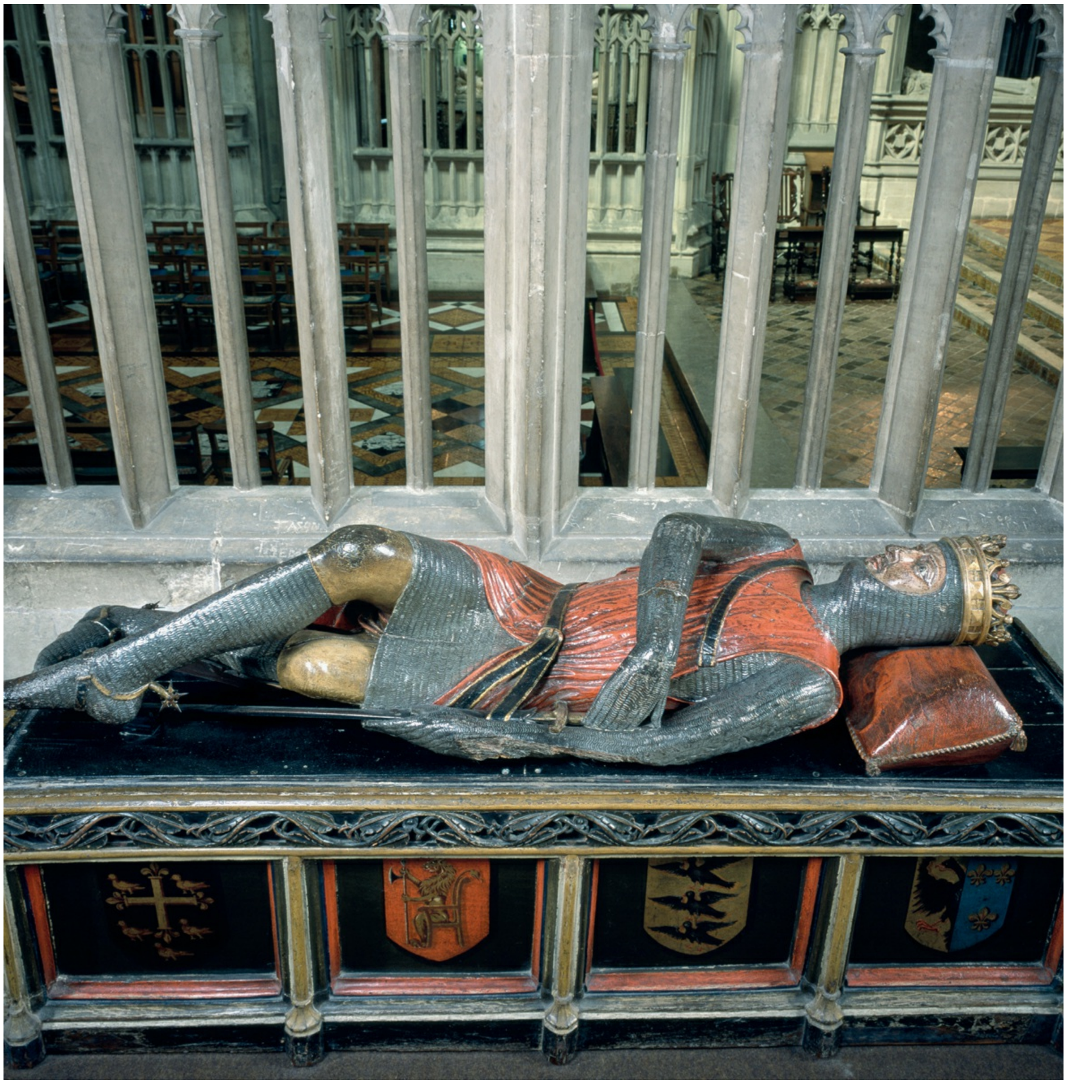


The impression in wax of the early 13th-century seal of Robert FitzWalter, showing what appears to be a padded testier on the horse's head and neck. (Granger, NYC/TopFoto)

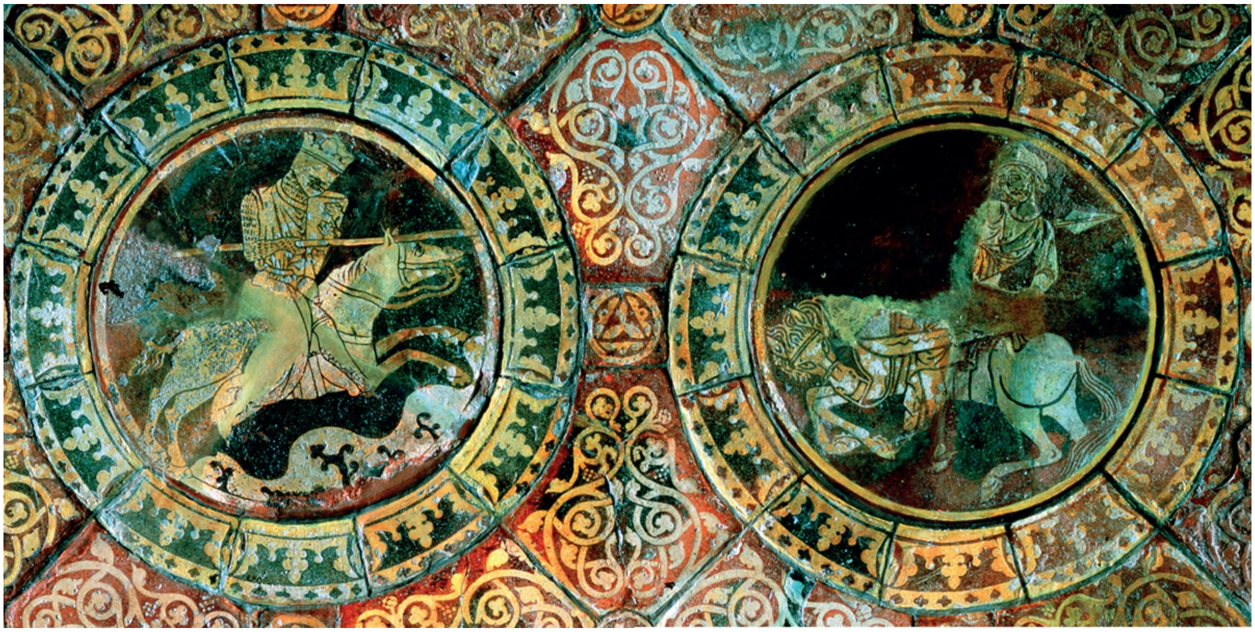
MEDIEVAL MONARCHS, 1199–1500

1199	Death of Richard I. Accession of John.
1216	Death of John. Minority of Henry III.
1227	Henry III assumes reins of government.
1272	Death of Henry III. Accession of Edward I.
1307	Death of Edward I. Accession of Edward II.
1327	Murder of Edward II and accession of Edward III.
1376	Death of Edward, Prince of Wales, the Black Prince.
1377	Death of Edward III and accession of Richard II.

1399	Murder of Richard II. Accession of Henry IV.
1413	Death of Henry IV. Accession of Henry V.
1422	Death of Henry V. Accession of Henry VI.
1460	Battle of Northampton: capture of Henry VI. Richard of York proclaimed Protector of England. Later, battle of Wakefield, where York is killed.
1461	Second battle of St Albans: Lancastrian victory. Henry VI recovered by Lancastrians. Accession of Edward IV.
1469	Battle of Edgecote: Lancastrian ‘Robin of Redesdale’ defeats Yorkists. Capture of Edward IV.
1470	Battle of Losecoat Field: Yorkist victory over Lincolnshire rebels. Restoration of Henry VI.
1471	Capture of Henry VI. Defeat of Lancastrians at battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury. Murder of Henry VI in the Tower of London and restoration of Edward IV.
1483	Death of Edward IV. Accession and murder of Edward V. Accession of Richard III.
1485	Battle of Bosworth: Lancastrian/Tudor victory. Death of Richard III. Accession of Henry Tudor as Henry VII.
1487	Coronation of pretender Lambert Simnel as ‘Edward VI’. Battle of Stoke Field. Defeat of rebel force and capture of Simnel.
1499	Execution of pretender Perkin Warbeck (‘Richard, Duke of York’). Execution of Edward, Earl of Warwick.

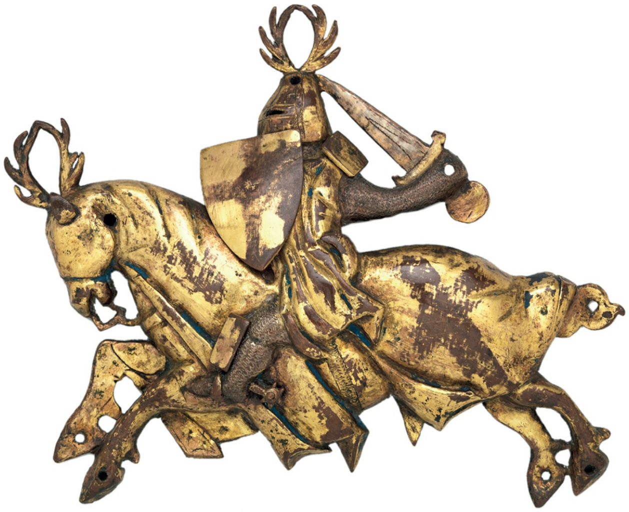


The late 13th-century wooden effigy of Robert of Gloucester in Gloucester Cathedral. His knees are protected by padded (gamboised) cuisses. (Angelo Hornak/Alamy)



Tiles of about 1255–60, from Chertsey Abbey in Surrey, depicting Richard I jousting against Saladin. Note the crown around Richard’s helm. (Ann Ronan Pictures/Print Collector/Getty Images)

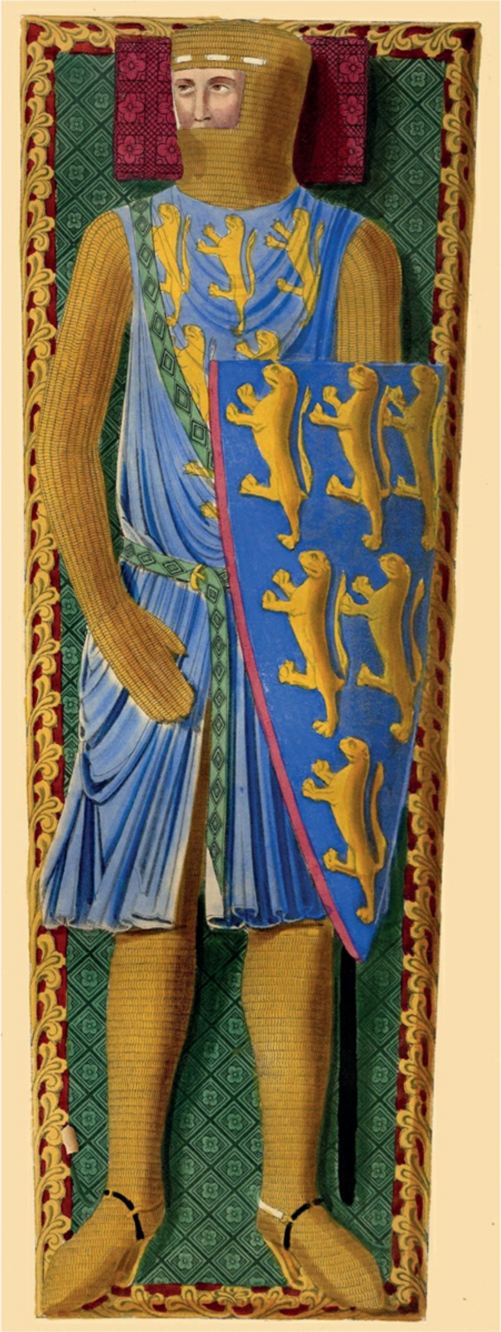
INTRODUCTION



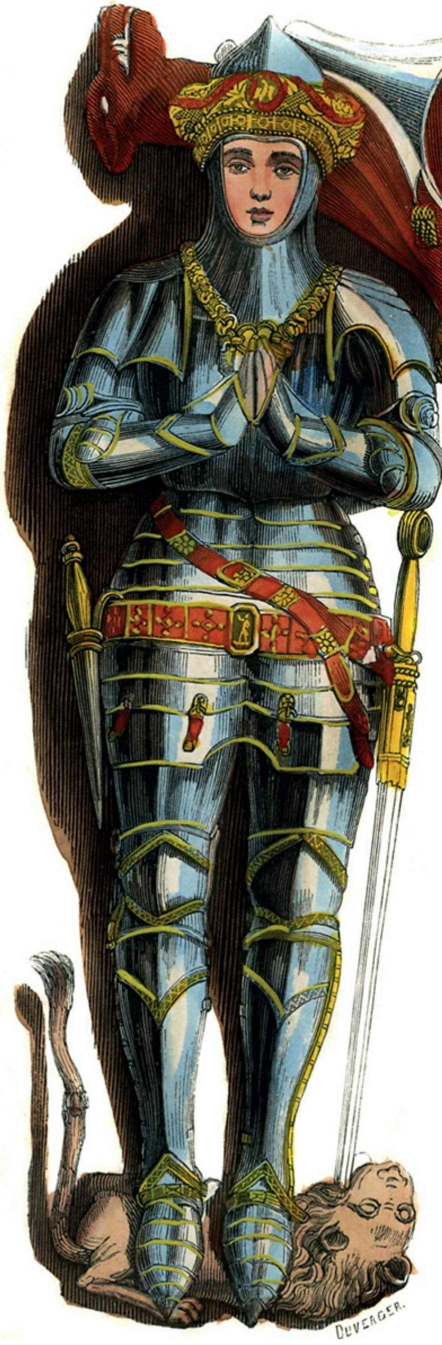
A possibly English plaque of around 1300 in the form of a charging knight. His helm is adorned with an antler crest, which is repeated on the head of his caparisoned warhorse. He wears ailettes (flat pieces of wood, leather or parchment, that would have been decorated with his coat-of-arms) on his shoulders and his sword is acutely pointed to burst through mail links. (Metropolitan Museum, New York/Public Domain)

The years between 1200 and 1500 saw the flowering of the chivalrous knight, before his ultimate demise in the century that followed. It is the period that embraced both the ideals of chivalry as we think of them today and also the image of the knight in shining armour. Early knights were basically fighting men, but during the 12th century this attitude had been somewhat compromised and the modification of 'chivalry' from being a word simply denoting horsemanship, to include the attitude of respect for women and protection of the church and the weak – however idealistic – was under way. The church had for centuries attempted to rein in the knightly predilection to fight; now it used its influence to direct knightly aggression to its own ends in the crusades. Apart perhaps from the Third Crusade in which Richard I (the Lionheart) had been a leader, England had not notably participated in these adventures. In the 12th century, the cult of the Virgin Mary saw a great upsurge in popularity, especially in France, partly because of the writings of theologians such as Bernard of Clairvaux. At the same time the south of France had spawned the troubadours, who sang of unrequited love for high-born ladies. Such sentiments slowly moved north to the slightly less sentimental *trouvères*, being also adapted by the *minnesingers* in the German lands. There also arose the great romances of literature, with the magical tales of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table being especially popular in England.

Thus, as the 13th century began, English knights were embracing a more civilized regime than perhaps did those who had crossed the sea with William the Conqueror in 1066. Many who had fought under William and been rewarded with estates were joined later by other men who had come over in the wake of the Conquest, eager to find new opportunities in England. Their language was generally French, the language of chivalry; English was the tongue of the conquered, yet it had persisted because of the large number of natives who continued to speak it. English nannies, servants and stewards passed it on as they communicated with their new masters on their country estates, where other French speakers would often be limited in number. Already in the 12th century, Benedictine monk and chronicler Orderic Vitalis had noticed that, among freemen, it was difficult to tell French from English in the conquered land. Essentially, as early as Stephen's reign (1135–54), the struggles between the king and Empress Matilda had meant knights had to choose whether to base themselves and their holdings in England or Normandy; the loss of the latter to the French king in 1204 had accelerated such decisions. Growing up in England, the knights were increasingly more likely to acquire French than to have it as their first language. By the end of the century, Edward I could charge the King of France with threatening 'to wipe out the English tongue'. As the French spoken in England began to decline in quality, the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) sealed its doom as the main tongue of English lords.



The effigy of William Longespée in Salisbury Cathedral, dated around 1230–40, is the earliest surviving English military effigy, though restored in the 19th century. Note the lace threaded through the mail links to keep the coif in place; the shape of the latter suggests a padded arming cap beneath designed for a helm. (TopFoto)



This romanticized depiction of the effigy of Sir Richard Vernon (d.1451) in Tong church, Shropshire, demonstrates the abiding interest in chivalry in the 19th century. The figure shows the transition of armour from mail to full plate and includes a richly jewelled cloth orle circling his basinet, while his head reclines on his crested jousting helm. (Culture Club/Getty Images)

Despite the change in language among knights in England, their very status would form a bond between such warriors from all over Europe, men who shared the same sort of privileged existence, who understood chivalry, armour, weapons and horses, who had learned poetry, romances and good manners, had coats-of-arms and took part in tournaments. They knew they were set apart from others, yet English knighthood was not as elitist as, for example, the French equivalent. At the great battles of the 14th and 15th centuries, dismounted knights stood side by side with free-born longbowmen. Their society was dissimilar from that in German lands where initially there were still serf knights called *ministeriales;* it differed too from that in Italy, with its long tradition of urban centres harking back to the Roman past, where knights were more relegated to the countryside. English knights took their place in the shire courts and, during the 13th century, in the new parliament in London. Occasionally men from very different backgrounds became knights. Some individuals clever enough to obtain positions in the government or in trade, including some from free peasant backgrounds, attained enough status to be knighted. As the emphasis changed from landed to monetary wealth in the 15th century, so more people were able to enter the ranks of chivalry.

It would be wrong to suppose that England teemed with knights: compared to the population as a whole, or indeed to the other soldiers in any army, their numbers were usually small. The 5,000 of suitable rank under Henry II (1154–89) had shrunk to about 1,500 by 1300. Knights served in various ways. The feudal system had come to England with the Norman conquerors, hand in hand with the castle and knighthood. Forty days' service to the king or lord each year, in return for land, formed one aspect of the system but some knights also served in their master's households where necessary, being fed and sheltered by him in return for immediate service. The 13th century saw all this begin to change in England with the appearance of contracts, an answer to the problem of providing professional armies to fight abroad; during the next century this became usual.

There were plenty of opportunities to fight in order to gain ransoms and win renown. The struggle between King John and his barons, then between Henry III and Simon de Montfort, provided work for the knight during the 13th century. Henry's son, Edward I, waged war against the Welsh, followed by the Scots. As the century turned, victories were won north of the border, but a great defeat was suffered at Bannockburn in 1314 under Edward II. When order was restored under his son, Edward III, English knights found themselves entering the Hundred Years' War, at first winning great victories alongside their archers in France and even Spain. Gradually the French changed their strategy and the victories dried up until, following the English defeat at Castillon in 1453, English forces left France. They would return in the next century under the Tudors, with varying but frequently short-lived success. Meanwhile the knights fell upon one another at home in the Wars of the Roses, where ransoms were often forgotten as families settled old scores, only ending in 1485 when Henry Tudor took the crown after Bosworth.

Fully armed for war, the knight of 1500 was far removed from his predecessor of 1200. The interlinked mail that covered a man from head to toe was gradually replaced during the age of transition – the 14th century – so that by the dawning of the 15th century the knight in shining armour of plates had emerged, his armour designed to furnish a hard, glancing surface against arrows, weapon edges and points. Further fine-tuning of designs would see national styles develop as great centres arose to furnish harnesses of the finest quality. The sword, though now modified from a cutting weapon to one able to thrust through armour, was still the main knightly weapon and never really lost its symbolism. It was a major part of the knighting ceremony, when it was belted around the recipient. Some magnificent blades testified to many hours in the forging process.

Added to the rising cost of armour and weapons, a knight had to have his horse, the *cheval*, from which came 'chivalry'. Increasingly knights owned several mounts, for riding, war and perhaps tournament, as well as pack animals and horses for squires and followers. Warhorses were specially trained and well-bred, sometimes extremely expensive animals. Even when knights dismounted for combat their horses were a necessity for the pursuit and, in peacetime, as a badge of rank. Squires or valets were needed to help a man arm, especially when plate armour was worn. The cost of maintaining all these men, animals and equipment was a serious consideration for those wishing to take up knighthood.

The idea of young men serving apprenticeships as pages, then squires, until knighthood was bestowed, was commonplace throughout Europe. Before the 13th century the status of the squire is less clear-cut; many seem to have simply been servants, while others were of noble birth and destined for knighthood. Eligible squires increasingly avoided knighthood because of the expense (not least of the knighting ceremony itself) and the burdens of duties they would be expected to perform. Only knights could lead troops, however, and the situation became so bad in England that, especially in the 13th and 14th centuries, kings forced eligible squires to be knighted, a practice called 'distraint'. Some squires never took up the rank, though knighting before a battle, commonest in the 14th and 15th centuries, had several advantages for the recipient, namely a lack of expensive ceremony, better pay and an improved chance of being taken for ransom rather than being killed out of hand.

The adjunct to the knight, his castle, was certainly not something all could afford. A great lord might hold several, one of which would form the centre of his honour – his power base – but others had a more modest stronghold or were simply their manor house. Many knights found that war was too risky a business and preferred to live their lives more peaceably, sending others to do their service in the commutation known as 'scutage', first recorded in the 12th century. By contrast some men loved war as a way to make their fortune. If war and ransoms were not available in English armies, knights hired out their services elsewhere as mercenaries. England was never a noted supplier of hired soldiers, as was for example Brabant in the Low Countries, but English knights might be seen in any European hotspot. They assisted the Teutonic Knights in their struggles in Eastern Europe to Christianize the Slav peoples; others, such as Sir John Hawkwood, who became leader of the mercenary White Company in 1364, journeyed to Italy to seek their fortune in the wars between the despots. The theatres of war reeled off by Chaucer in the description of his 'perfect' Knight in *The Canterbury Tales* should be remembered.

An alternative to war was the tournament, a useful theatre for battle training. Originally thought of as potential hotbeds of revolt, once that fear receded, tournaments became increasingly magnificent. The lists, having evolved to become an enclosed arena rather than the great tracts of countryside previously allotted, would witness elaborate spectacles laid on by princes and great lords to enhance their own image. In the 12th century, at the earliest tournaments, many knights attended in hope of finding a lord or winning fortunes by capturing opponents for ransom; however, over time the spectacle increasingly became the most important part. Rich costumes and imaginative settings brought out the theatrical side of the knight; literary themes increasingly pervaded the scene, as knights entered the lists attired as legendary or mythical heroes. Together with this world of wonderment came more use of the spoken word, as speeches were made to complete the fantasy.

The age of the knight drew to a close in the 16th century, although in many ways the decline had begun at least a century earlier. The rise of large professional infantry armies, the depredations of bow, crossbow and pike, plus the advent of firearms, all signalled the end of the mounted noble as the arbiter of the battlefield. Even the castle – that most visible representation of the knight's presence – entered its descent phase, made strategically redundant by cannon and a host of social factors. There were some final flourishes in knightly armour and chivalric culture during the Tudor period, but the knight's heyday was over.

Yet it is notable how the medieval knight endures fairly effortlessly to this day in popular culture, appearing frequently in modern cinematic and literary presentations, albeit with varying degrees of fantasy and reality. The fusion of noble character and ferocity at arms remains, rightly or wrongly, psychologically compelling. Perhaps for our complex time, the knight represents a perfect heroic model, without jagged or jaded edges. It is largely the knight's chivalric connotations that have imposed this filter; the rose-tinted vision often masks gritty and far from ethical behaviour on campaign, although there do appear to have been some genuinely pious warriors. What is undeniable, however, is that the medieval knight provides a unique window into a time utterly different from our own, and for that reason alone he remains compelling.

ORGANIZATION

Warwick Castle originated in a motte-and-bailey castle built in 1068, but it underwent major rebuilding in stone during the 12th–14th centuries, becoming one of the most recognizable examples of defensive architecture in England. (DeFacto/CC BY-SA 4.0)

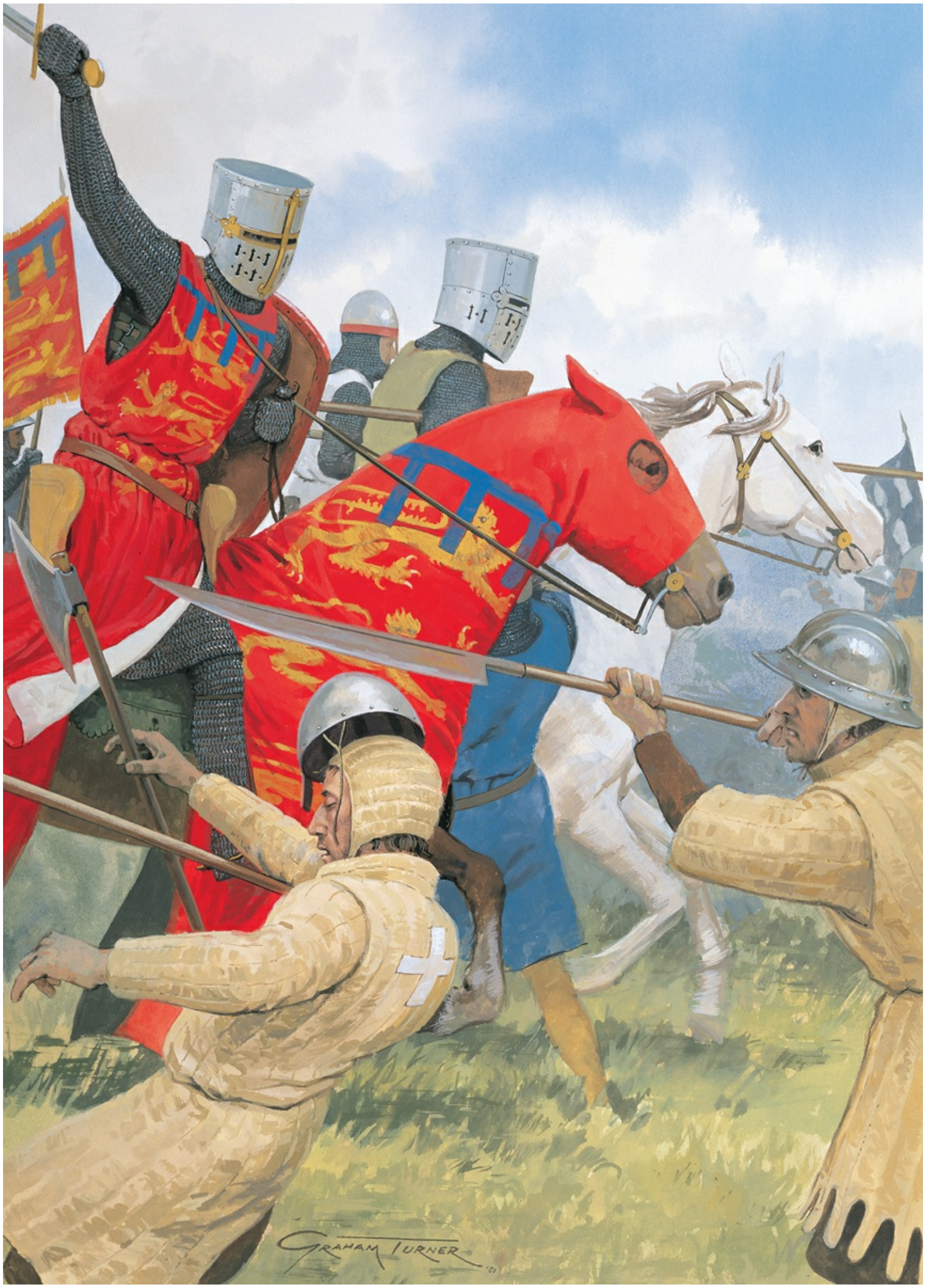
Looking at the knights of the 13th century, the forces of English kings and magnates were made up from several elements. Household 'knights' formed the core of fighting men, a group made up of bannerets (knights who led a troop in war, named for their square banner), knights and squires directly serving their lord or king, whose numbers could be augmented by several means. The old idea of military service as a feudal obligation, though still alive, was diminishing in importance, increasingly being supplemented or replaced by service in return for pay. The idea of using wages was not new, but the extent to which this method would be employed, and the idea of military contracts that also developed, was different. In contrast to this new type of military–financial arrangement we also still find magnates who followed the king for nothing but honour and sometimes a desire to avenge themselves on their enemies.

There were several ways a knight could join a retinue, the usual avenues being as a family member, as a household knight, or as a military tenant. Kinsmen provided an obvious source of warriors for a lord. In 1297, for the Flanders and Falkirk campaigns, Aymer de Valence contracted with Thomas and Maurice Berkeley for knights and troopers for a fixed fee in peace, to serve at the usual wages in war, themselves serving as bannerets with two squires each, the knights with one each besides troopers.

THE FAMILIA

Lords had their familia ('family') of paid household knights. This provided fighting men at short notice and was especially valuable in conquered or turbulent regions such as the Marches on the borders with Wales or Scotland. The knights and squires who composed a familia might become close to their lord. When near death in 1219, for example, William Marshal refused to allow the sale of his furs and robes to raise money for alms, since he wanted them to go to his household knights.

The king's familia similarly made up the nucleus of the royal army, with as many soldiers as the feudal contingents, and this important body grew in size. The bannerets, knights bachelor and troopers in the royal familia drew rations and daily pay (4 shillings a banneret and 2 shillings a knight) but when on active service the knights received 3 shillings, perhaps to pay for extra rations or to pay the orderly who accompanied them. The household knights did a variety of jobs, ferrying prisoners, bringing up infantry or workmen, overseeing castles, or helping to govern conquered areas. Some stayed close to the king. Henry III had 30 or more knights receiving fees from the exchequer, while others seem to have been summoned. A muster list for the military household from 1225–26 reveals a total force of 97 knights (about 200 when their own retainers were added). Pay accounts mention that 527 out of 895 men bound for the Flanders campaign of 1297 were members of the household. Gascons and Spaniards were included in the royal familia.

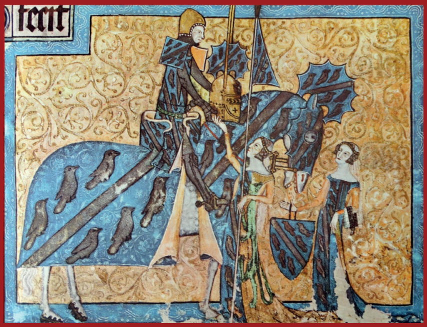


BATTLE OF LEWES, 14 MAY 1264: The charge of Prince Edward's cavalry routs the Londoners. Henry III faced Simon de Montfort with perhaps 10,000 men; Simon had about half that number.

THE FEUDAL SYSTEM

Feudal society had come to England with William the Conqueror in 1066. Magnates received land, often scattered over a number of areas, in return for military service. Lesser lords might in turn be enfeoffed of (hold land from) the magnates, though some held land directly from the king. A 'knight's fee' was the land considered to be enough to support a knight and his household to fulfil his feudal obligations. Some knights held land from several lords, in which case the most powerful usually became their liege lord, the one they followed above all others excepting the king himself. Such subinfeudation weakened a lord's hold on his men and could lead to court cases.

Homage was a formal ceremony in front of witnesses during which the man knelt before his prospective lord and placed his hands between those of the latter, then swore to be his man and to follow him. The oath of fealty was also taken. The new vassal, or tenant, was then given some token to signify the agreement, such as a glove or flag. By the 13th century the knight's fee was assessed on property rather than on land held, so that men could be summoned who could afford the costs involved.



Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, from the *Luttrell Psalter* of around 1335–45. He receives his lance and helm from his wife, while his daughter-in-law holds his shield. He wears some plate armour on his limbs. (Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group/Getty Images)

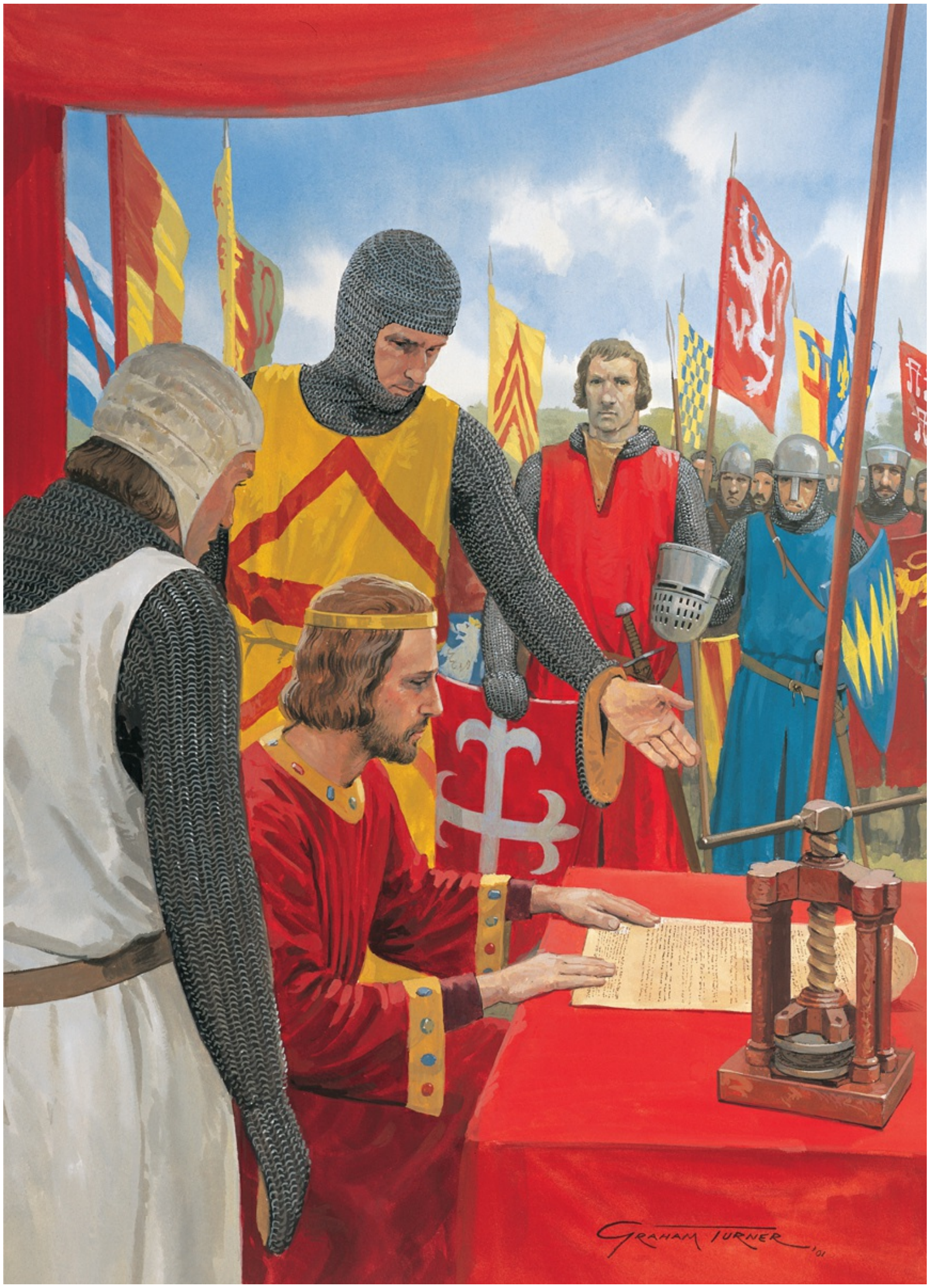
Household knights and retinues varied in number, but Henry III could probably raise 100 or more knights quickly. Such figures varied depending on royal requirements and money, and generally fell between 40 and 80 knights and bannerets. To this figure must be added squires and sergeants of the household, some 170 in about 1285, plus the retinues of the knights themselves. Each knight had to keep two squires and three horses. The king provided horses and sometimes gave armours or pieces of armour.

Permanent units of mercenary knights and crossbowmen were also attached to the royal forces. John employed large numbers under such men as Fawkes de Bréauté, honourably mentioned at the second battle of Lincoln in 1217. Magna Carta in 1215 attempted to expel all foreign mercenaries from the country and numbers diminished after this, but in 1230 Henry III may have hired as many as 500 knights and 1,000 sergeants in Poitou. In 1242 some 700 mercenary crossbowmen were in the English army campaigning in France and Edward I hired 1,523 crossbowmen from Gascony in 1282, compared with 173 household knights and bannerets and 72 squires. Mercenaries were usually arranged in constabularies of 100 men, the individual troops composing these averaging ten to 15 men, and 25 to 35 for the commander of the unit. The usual period of paid service was 40 days at a time, reflecting the standard term of feudal duty.

At Falkirk in 1298 the total strength of the household troops plus associated mercenaries was slightly less than 800 men, compared with only 564 supplied by the nobles. In 1300 the household cavalry and mercenaries came to 522, as opposed to 40 knights and 366 sergeants from the feudal summons. From 1277 Welsh footsoldiers were recruited into the royal forces.

TENURE BY KNIGHT SERVICE

Initially magnates were expected to serve in person with their full agreed quota of knights, which included two or more troopers in each knight’s retinue. Lesser barons could make up their quota of knights using the notion that one knight was worth two retainers; thus a requirement of six might be made up of three knights and six retainers. Unlike the richer bannerets, many knights brought perhaps a single squire and one or two other followers. A few tenants-in-chief did feudal service under an earl rather than bring several horsemen to the larger muster. Service required beyond 40 days was usually paid, though some, out of pride or hatred for the enemy, refused to take payment. As soon as scutage (‘shield money’: a tax paid by knights in lieu of performing military service) was accepted in the 12th century, knights’ fees could be held by people with no intention of becoming knights. By the early 13th century, some 80 per cent of the 5,000 knights in the country paid scutage or fines, rather than serve in person.



MAGNA CARTA: In June 1215 the disgruntled barons seized London and sent a representative to the king, who reluctantly agreed to the Articles of the Barons which would later be set down as the Magna Carta. Here rebel leader Robert FitzWalter points at the document. The seal press stands ready to impress the royal seal on the wax.

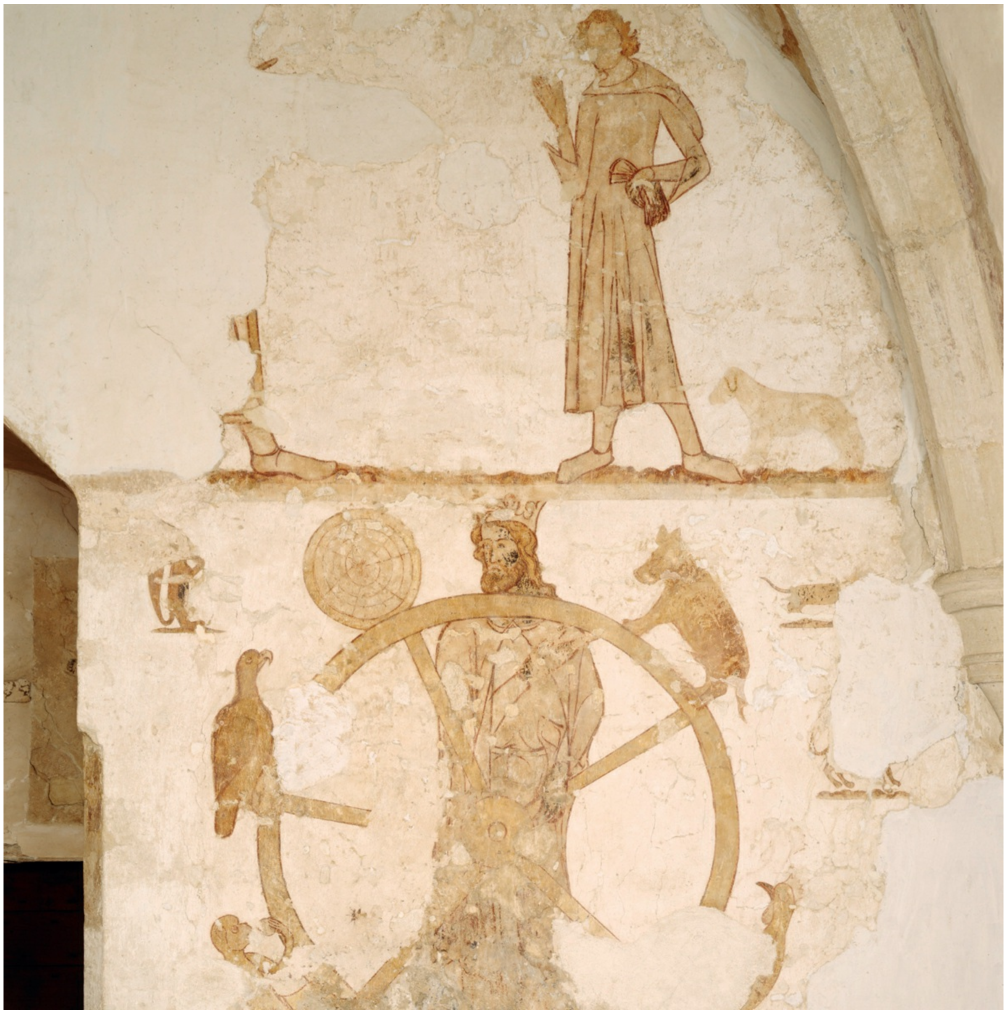
Feudal troops serving their tenant-in-chief seem to have been paid, but when serving to fulfil the tenant's obligation to the king, the service was at their own expense. Sometimes the service was performed without a summons being issued, and by the end of the century this type of service was often performed for pay. Some men saw the opportunity of obtaining land or privileges by offering the king knight service.

On occasion, two knights would come to a mutual agreement called brotherhood in arms. One brotherhood agreement from 1298 is a rare survivor of a common practice, by which gains were shared as well as losses, and the two knights mutually supported one another.

As well as military service in the field, knights were expected to perform castle-guard duty at the tenant-in-chief's castle or a local royal fortress. Service varied, from 15 days a year to four months in every 12. Some knights were expected to do the service only in wartime; some were exempted from service in the army, and others had to do both. By the 13th century castle-guard service was commonly commuted for money to pay for mercenaries. Marcher lords held strongholds along the borders with Wales, which they helped to subjugate. Marcher lords on the Scottish borders were constantly called out to repel raids.

A TIME OF CHANGE

At the beginning of the 13th century, the nature of feudal service began to change. The system that had been in use for several centuries could not supply the requirements of a modern fighting force. One pressing problem was the need for men to fight in long campaigns outside England, something for which the traditional 40-day feudal service limit was not well designed. Another was the rising cost of knighthood, of equipping horsemen. Paying knights at 2 shillings per man per day meant that it would be extremely expensive for a magnate to provide as many fully armoured cavalry as had been expected in the previous century, when prices were much lower. New royal feudal bargains reflected this, with much lower demands for men. Some magnates simply did not bring their full quotas when summoned. In 1214 the Earl of Devon brought 20 knights, rather than the 89 he actually owed. According to the Unknown Charter, issued before Magna Carta, the barons believed that anyone owing over ten knights should have their service reduced. As well as magnates and their large retinues, John summoned individual knights from great honours such as Tickhill, who often came alone or with one knight. Unusually, John gave repayable prests (cash advances) to those performing feudal service, as in the Irish expedition of 1210 and that in Poitou in 1214.



The interior of Longthorpe Tower in Cambridgeshire, added by Robert de Thorpe, steward of Peterborough Abbey in about 1330 to an existing manor house of around 1300–10. This rare survivor has walls covered in paintings made for him or his son. (English Heritage/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

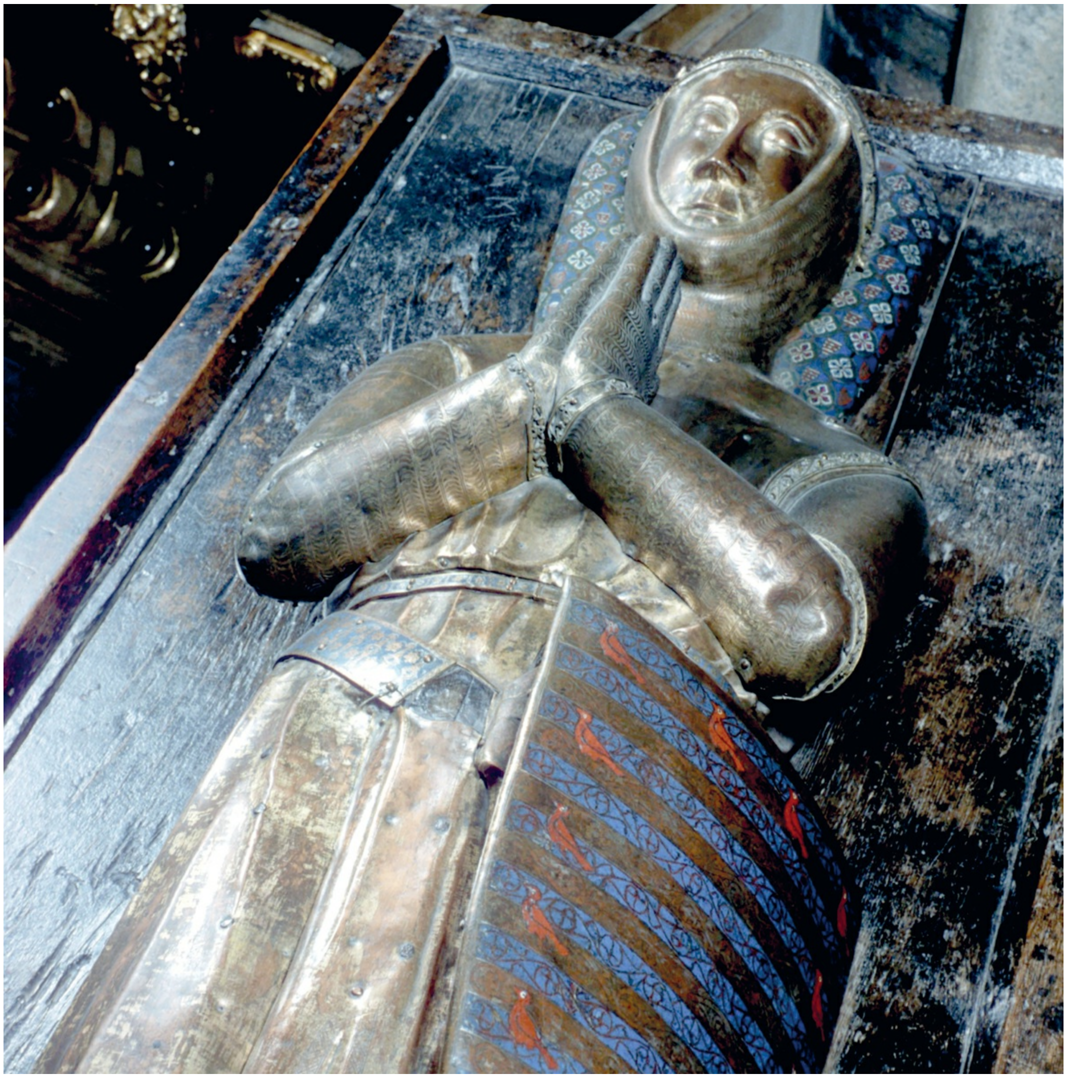
Magna Carta did not reduce quotas; it only prevented further burdens. Individual bargains, however, did result in a large decrease in the size of the feudal call-up for magnates, though lesser lords did not feel anything like so great a benefit. The occasional inclusion of countesses in the lists indicates that personal service was not demanded, however. In 1229 about 500–600 knights were collected. Courtenay had owed 92 knights but now only had to provide three; Robert of St John sent five instead of 55, and actually owed only three.

Robert of Newborough's quota had been reduced from 15 to 12, but he still only supplied two knights. Nor were knights' fees greatly enlarged to go with the reduced quotas. Magnates who had owed large numbers of men would have incurred huge expenses to bring them all, and a large number in reserve ensured a supply for a long campaign. It was perhaps also safer for the crown that such lords did not get into the habit of raising impressive forces, which could be dangerous. In 1282 the Earls of Norfolk and Hereford withdrew with their quotas after their 40-day service, highlighting the dangerous gap that would have been left had their whole retinues been present.

These new quotas were too small to be practical, and it is significant that the crown (and lords in their turn) still demanded scutage at the old rate. Fines were levied for underpayment of scutage or refusal to send adequate numbers of men, but there were many occasions when the fines were carried over and large sums remained owing. Although it might have been simpler for the kings to move to an entirely money-based military system, objections from the nobles to their feudal duties being replaced by wages caused the continuation of the summons. When Edward I tried to raise troops for Gascony in 1294 the muster had to be postponed because of poor attendance. However, campaigns such as Flanders (1297) and Falkirk (1298) were conducted without a feudal summons.

PAID SERVICE

By Edward I's reign greater finances were available especially from taxation, customs duties and credit obtained from Italian merchants. Edward was thus able to recruit much larger armies than previously, and paid troops were useful in campaigns such as those in Wales and Scotland. In 1277 and 1282, some retainers were taken into pay after their 40-day feudal service, for periods of 40 days at a time. In 1282 Edward offered pay to six earls and many tenants-in-chief but six weeks later there was a full feudal levy. Many magnates, perhaps not wishing to be equated with mercenaries, served voluntarily and did not accept royal pay.



The late 13th-century effigy of William de Valence (died 1296), in Westminster Abbey, carved in wood covered in copper-alloy. His surcoat bears his shield of arms. He has laces at wrist and elbow. (Woodmansterne/Topfoto)

However, such voluntary service could not go on indefinitely, and almost all barons served for pay at some time. The first surviving contract for pay dates from 1270, for Prince Edward's projected crusading enterprise; as king he first used them in the 1290s for campaigning in Gascony. In 1294 writs were served to 54 tenants-in-chief for paid duty in Gascony. For an expedition such as that of 1298 – the largest force raised by contract in Edward's reign – the paid troops appear to have comprised between a quarter and a third of the forces. Horsemen in the king's pay were provided with their own arms, armour, and horses. The king often gave favourite bannerets valuable animals, as well as armour, and horses lost in service were replaced.

A document of 1283 directed that arms and armour lost in royal service in war were to be made good, and mentions 200 shields, 140 headless lances and 120 lance-heads. In the unpaid feudal host such losses fell to the baron or retainer. The horse valuation lists provide a figure of about 1,300 men receiving pay at this time, which gives a total figure of perhaps 4,000 knights, squires and sergeants. The Earl of Surrey had six squadrons in pay, a total of 500 horse, and could raise another 200. Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, commanded five bannerets, nine knights and 17 men-at-arms. Financial accounts do not take note of non-combatants such as grooms or valets.

However, the majority of cavalry were probably not generally in receipt of wages from the king. By late century there was a rapid turnover of membership of retinues, men serving a different lord on each campaign, and personal loyalty was rare. Many knights came with only one or two followers, and were paid independently. It is uncertain whether they were placed in informal groups or perhaps, more likely, were given some independence within larger divisions. In the 1300 campaign John de St John had 65 followers, by far the largest single group, but there were many small ones.

COMPOSITION OF TROOPS

The captain of a paid squadron was normally of rank. Bannerets were usually tenants-in-chief, but often with small feudal obligations, with perhaps 13 to 15 followers; some were themselves part of a large retinue. Bannerets could also be promoted from knights-bachelor, a change signified by cutting off the end of the knightly pennon to make the square or rectangular banner. These were often landowners living near to each other and their captain. Even when tenants-in-chief were present, it was rare for them actually to serve in person, most instead using a substitute.

In the first decades of the 13th century, knights often outnumbered sergeants, but the ratio was changing. For the Welsh war of 1277, 228 knights and 294 sergeants served for 40 days without pay, with two sergeants equated to one knight in discharging their obligations. Only 40 knights were on the Caerlaverock campaign in 1300, but the number of sergeants had increased to 366. By this date sergeant (serviens) was the rank below a knight, as was squire (scutifer) and valet (valletti), which appears to be another term for squire (as was armiger).

During this century, the organization of cavalry units seems to have undergone a change. At the beginning of the century they were usually divided into units or multiples of ten, called conrois, as had been used in Norman England. A unit of ten men seems to have made up the constabularia.

A document from late in Edward's reign suggests royal household cavalry were still organized into constabularia. Most cavalry by this time, however, was divided into the retinues of bannerets and knights. Unlike in France, the decimal system of organizing units in tens, hundreds and thousands seems to have gradually dropped out of use. The loss of such systematic organization may have had something to do with the reduction of effectiveness of horsemen in a co-ordinated charge, and possibly has a bearing on the failure of cavalry in the Scottish conflicts. By 1300 the decimal system had disappeared in England.

Already in the 'Assize of Arms' of 1181, Henry II expected every baron who had a number of knights' fees on his demesne (feudal holdings) to supply as many sets of hauberks, helmets, shields and lances for them. Henry III's 'Assize' raised the limit to £15 and added a horse to the requirements. Henry III's Assize of 1242 and Edward I's Statute of Winchester in 1285 confirmed the obligation of freemen between the ages of 16 and 60 to perform military service. In 1205, when a French invasion seemed imminent, John called up all freemen over the age of 12, to be organized under constables in their respective hundreds, towns or boroughs. By 1225 even unfree villeins, serfs tied to the land, were liable to be called up in an emergency, usually being organized by the sheriffs. In the late 13th century, commissioners of array took over. The period of service, normally paid except within the shire, was usually 40 days. Infantry were usually divided into units of 100 under a mounted constable. Each unit was subdivided into five units of 20 under an officer called a vintenar; by the end of the century the millenar (who might be a knight, and possibly of the royal household) looked after bodies of 1,000 men. Towns also raised militias, that of London suffering particularly on the rebel side at the battle of Lewes.

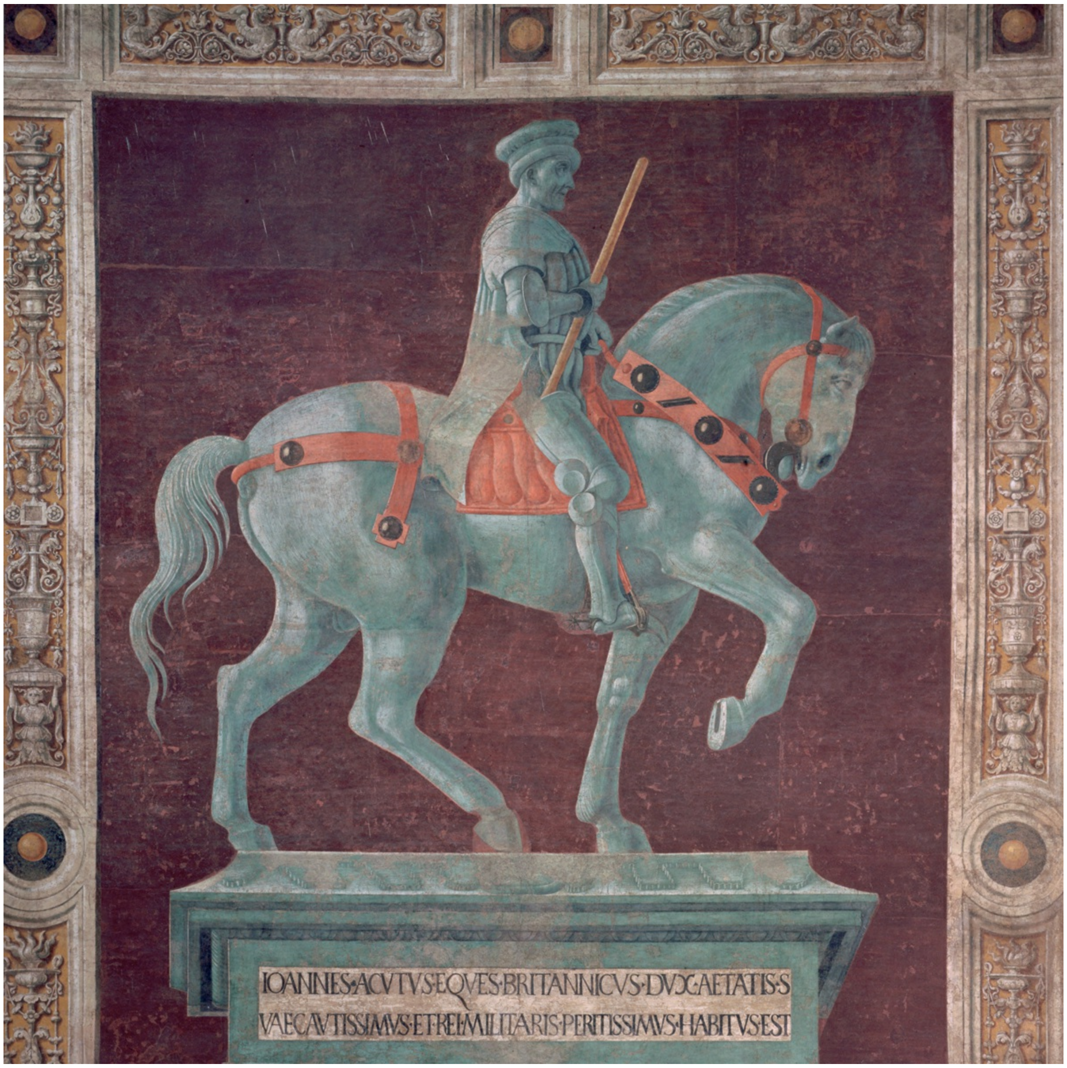
The tower house of the castle of Warkworth in Northumberland. Built by the Percy family in about 1390 on the remains of the old Norman castle, such buildings are descendants of the keep. (Draco2008/CC BY 2.0)

THE 14TH CENTURY

At the beginning of the 14th century, knights and squires might serve in several different contexts. They might be employed as household knights, as feudal troops, as volunteers, or as paid fighting men. Many knights were quite prepared to fight when the call came for troops, but their wish was for relatively short campaigns.

Knighthood now formed a bridge between county knights and the landed aristocracy, whose great estates and judicial rights had been slowly eroded by the increase in royal power and government involvement in local areas. This stability and order was reinforced by the continuation of service, now increasingly laid down by indenture (contract). Some knights originated as members of the free peasantry whose family had risen in government or religious lay office until their status (particularly in the legal profession) rendered them worthy of knighthood. Marriage was still a lucrative way to acquire wealth, but for landless younger sons there was not much to offer a girl's family in return for her dowry. Not many of the English gentry made a career of war, although the landless knights had less call on their time at home, and were often willing to stay in the field. Others pursued military careers even after the Treaty of Bretigny in 1360 had removed English troops and garrisons in France, and instead joined the free companies. There were a few knightly bandits in England, gangs led by gentry such as the Folevilles and Coterels in the 1320s and 1330s, who settled matters of land ownership by summary justice.

After 1360, the term 'knight of the chamber' began to be used to the exclusion of 'household knight', perhaps because of their more domestic duties. It should be remembered that Edward III took a less active military role in his later years and his own household was being run more along the lines of those of the great magnates. Under Richard II a new term appears: 'king's knights' were men who drew annuities from the exchequer instead of royal household fees. King's knights formed the nucleus of the later 14th-century armies, but were not as close to the king himself as the earlier household knights. In 1394 Richard II had 48 king's knights for his Irish expedition, over half the total number of knights and bannerets in charge of retinues.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Sir John Hawkwood (*c.*1323–94), as depicted in this detail from a 1436 Florentine fresco by Paulo Uccello. Hawkwood is said to have started his career as a longbowman, fighting at Crécy in 1346 and Poitiers in 1356, subsequently joining and leading the White Company and making his fortune as a mercenary in Italy. (Alinari Archives/CORBIS/Corbis/Getty Images)

OBLIGATIONS TO SERVE

As Edward I became involved in wars with Scotland and France, he found the restrictions of feudal service were becoming a burden. Full coffers would allow him to take armies of professional fighting men out of England for long periods of time if necessary. Thus by 1300 his armies also enlisted members of the baronage for periods of service by contract, whereby they were paid to follow the army for a designated campaign or time. Perhaps lack of interest in Scottish campaigns that promised little reward had something to do with it, as well as hard economics. Most had already served in this way when the 14th century opened, but feudal service remained, largely because aristocrats did not want to be seen serving for pay like common mercenaries.

For his campaign of 1316, Edward II asked for as many additional troops as the tenants could bring, but now homage was demanded as well, with a threat of confiscating lands if not obeyed. No exact obligation or pay structure was laid down, and it caused much bitterness and could not be implemented. Service from £50 landholders was also demanded with similar threats. In 1327, Edward III ordered his first and only feudal summons, the last of such demands. The summonses of 1314, 1322 and 1327 had not been stunning successes, but the usage of terms such as 'fealty' and 'homage' continued to be used when agreements were made. In the early 14th century, new lands in Scotland were given under feudal obligation, to provide castle garrisons, while in Ireland the practice continued into the 15th century. It was revived in England in 1385 for a Scottish campaign (though no troops were really necessary), perhaps so that Richard II could confirm that such summonses could still be demanded.

In the 1330s, Edward III revised the 1285 Statute of Winchester, which defined the equipment of different classes of society. He demanded that a £40 landholder should have arms and horse for himself and one other. In 1344 this idea was extended, with a scale for assessing contributions to the army, embracing all those with an income of £5 or more, up to £1,000; £5 meant finding an archer, £25 a man-at-arms. Only the successful campaign with its victory at Crécy staved off a real backlash.

None of these attempts to raise men by non-feudal obligation had any great success, and some caused serious ripples in government. Walter de Milemete, a royal clerk writing in the 1320s, puts it at the bottom of the three ways to raise men, with voluntary service as the most favoured. Between these come paid troops, and it was with pay and rewards that the king would find the successful formula for raising field armies.

Pay was more attractive than feudal summons. By 1300 the crown usually paid a knight 2 shillings a day, a sergeant or man-at-arms 1 shilling, but others were forced to offer higher wages as the need arose. Edward III induced service by paying twice the rate between 1338 and 1339 but had to fall back to the lower level. Even this tended to be based on horses owned. Some men-at-arms with only two horses found their wages held at 12 pence.

Prest advances, which dated back to the 12th century, might also be paid out to help a man bring together and maintain his following. The sum was offset against the total wage, but Edward I paid few in his later years, because of a shortage of money. Edward III paid many prests to foreign fighting men in his army but some English knights also received them. Wages were frequently in arrears, however, so much so that huge debts accrued.

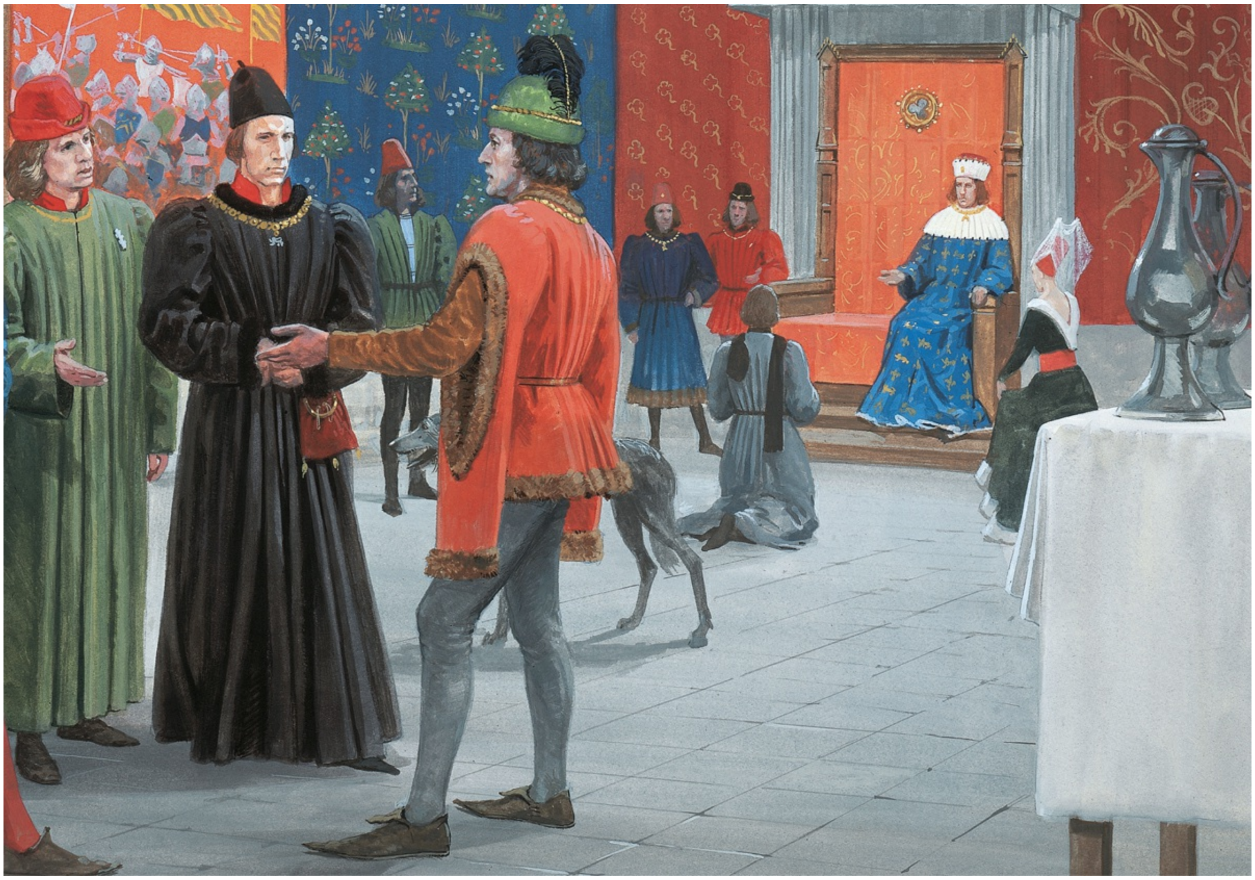
The use of contracts, or indentures, increased gradually in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. Two copies of the terms were set out on one piece of parchment and a wavy or zig-zag line was drawn horizontally to separate them. The parchment was cut in half along this line, one half going to the contractor and the other to the contracted knight. The unique shape of the pieces was a useful protection against forgery or deceit. It was, perhaps surprisingly, uncommon for the terms to be broken, even though one reason for such written contracts was a safeguard in the law. Contracts known as money fiefs (fief-rente), purchasing service for a fixed sum per year, had been used since the 11th century, and were used by Edward III to buy foreign allies. Captains in their turn made contracts with their followers.

THE 15TH CENTURY

By the 15th century, feudalism had given way to a new form of raising troops. Instead of lords granting fiefs (parcels of land) in return for supplying troops, they now contracted men to fight for them. This has been called ‘bastard feudalism’.

At this time only about 5 to 10 per cent of men-at-arms in English armies were knights, the rest being esquires and ‘gentlemen’. By mid-century some men-at-arms were not even of this rank. At the beginning of the century, the ratio of archers to every man-at-arms had risen to 3:1, so that, on average, each man-at-arms was served by a page or valet plus three archers, the latter usually mounted for mobility, though they fought on foot. This composition was essentially the same as the European ‘lance’, though this unit appellation and form of recruitment was not customary in England during the Wars of the Roses.

Great lords employed knights and men-at-arms in private retinues, indeed sometimes so many that they formed private armies. Under this system of 'livery and maintenance', the retainers wore their lord's coat with his livery colours, usually the two principal colours from his coat-of-arms, and they were maintained at his expense. It was a practice that meant nobles could field large bodies of troops and were a permanent threat to stability. If they could not be controlled by the upper strata of society through the crown's active intervention, then unrest would break out as private quarrels were pursued by force of arms. Always a threat, this problem increased during the Wars of the Roses, when families joined opposite sides in order to carry on private vendettas.



AT THE KINGMAKER'S COURT: Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, plots with friends while his one-time ally, Edward IV, talks with his in-laws, the Woodvilles. Courtiers wear dress that befits their rank, a conscious statement of their power and wealth. Warwick's followers wear his badge of the ragged staff.

Retainers could be called out at any time, and acted as bodyguards for their lord, accompanying him around the countryside, to his manors, to the court or tournament, or to war. They learned their trade as squires, yeomen or grooms, and wore their lord's livery. *The Black Book of Edward IV* gives the following guide to the maximum number of retainers allowed by various ranks of noblemen:

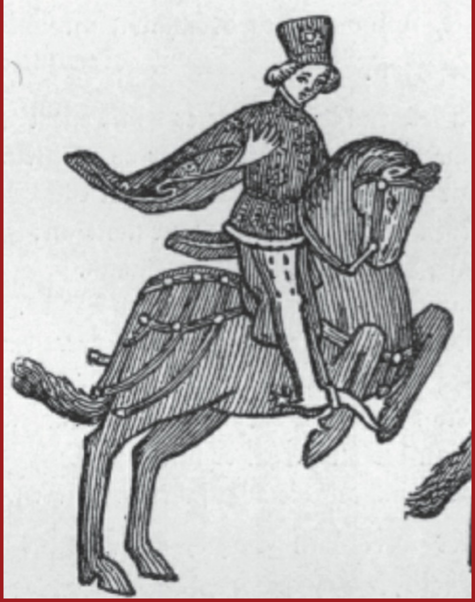
King: 600; Viscount: 80; Duke: 240; Baron: 40; Marquis: 200; Knight: 16; Earl: 140

For the duration of the Wars of the Roses, some 35 years, a maximum of about 50,000 men were ever in arms at one time, usually in short campaigns. It was, however, difficult to maintain a force of ideal size, especially with an itinerant aristocracy, when for example a retainer might arrive at his lord's house or castle with his own followers.

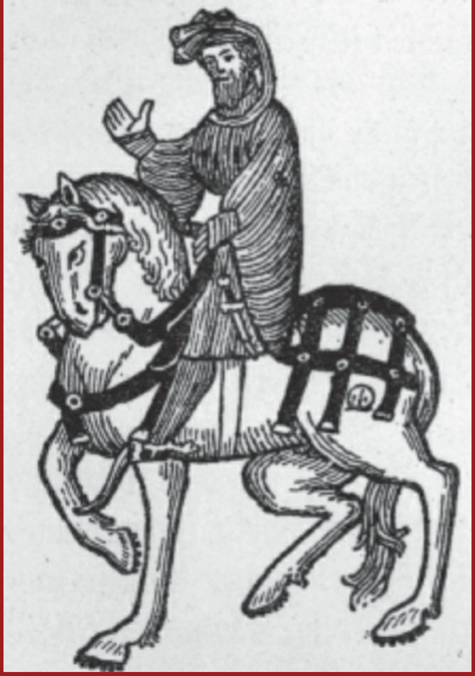
Some lived so far away that they were known as 'extraordinary retainers'. As with the old feudal practice of being enfeoffed to more than one lord, so retainers might hold contracts of several masters, which gave them more money, more chance of call up from his own estates. Billmen or soldiers carrying other staff weapons usually made up the remainder. Men-at-arms, who might fight mounted or on foot, were more likely to come from a retainer's own family or men in his household, again a small number compared with the archers. Unlike in the early part of the century, the ratio of archers to men-at-arms had changed noticeably, and could be as high as 8:1. For Edward IV's expedition to France a knight was paid two shillings a day, an esquire one shilling.

ARMS AND EQUIPMENT OF A 15TH-CENTURY KNIGHT

An inventory of Sir John Fastolf's possessions taken in 1448 mentions silk surcoats embroidered with his armorial bearings. Another in 1461 reveals that his castle at Caister was well defended by four breech-loading guns with eight chambers, two firing 7in. (15cm) stone balls, two firing 5in. (12cm) stones. A serpentine with three chambers fired a 10in. (25 cm) stone, another a 7in. (15cm) stone. Three fowlers fired 12in. (30cm) stones, while he also had two short guns for ships (he owned several for trade) with six chambers. Two small serpentines and four guns lying in stocks fired lead pellets. There were also seven handguns and equipment for the guns. Together with this firepower were 24 shields of elm, two of whalebone; eight old-fashioned suits of white armour; ten pairs of body armour, worn out; 14 horn jackets, worn out; ten basinets; 24 sallets; six gorgets; 16 lead hammers; nine bills; other pieces of armour and weapons; zinc caps; wire of little value; four great crossbows of steel, two of whalebone, four of yew; two haubergeons and a barrel to store them in.



The Squire, as depicted in the early 15th-century Ellesmere Chaucer. He wears fashionable civilian clothes and long piked riding boots. (akg-images)



Chaucer's Knight. He wears a vertically quilted jupon over the tunic with unusual bagpipe sleeves. The four straps at neck and shoulders may have been for securing an external breastplate, or perhaps for tying down the edges of a mail aventail (neck and shoulder mail covering). Note the brand on the horse's rump. (akg-images)

During the Wars of the Roses there was a revival in the use of 'Commissions of Array', the summoning of town and county militias, particularly by the Lancastrians. Such men had to be 'well and defencibly arrayed' according to the proclamation of 1463, which demanded that every man between the ages of 16 and 60 in 16 counties be ready to serve Edward IV at a day's notice. The ordering and enforcement of the Commissions usually fell to the sheriff of each county concerned. Nobles too might summon militias.

In 1471 the Earl of Warwick decreed death for anyone shirking his call to the militia, and the demands increasingly became less choosy about exactly who was called up. Large numbers of militia were, according to a commission of 1468, divided into companies of 1,000 men, subdivided into groups of 20 and 100. However, because of the fickle nature of loyalties, and the bitterness inherent in civil wars, troops might join whichever faction they preferred, regardless of the original summons. On occasion both sides called up the same militia force.

TRAINING

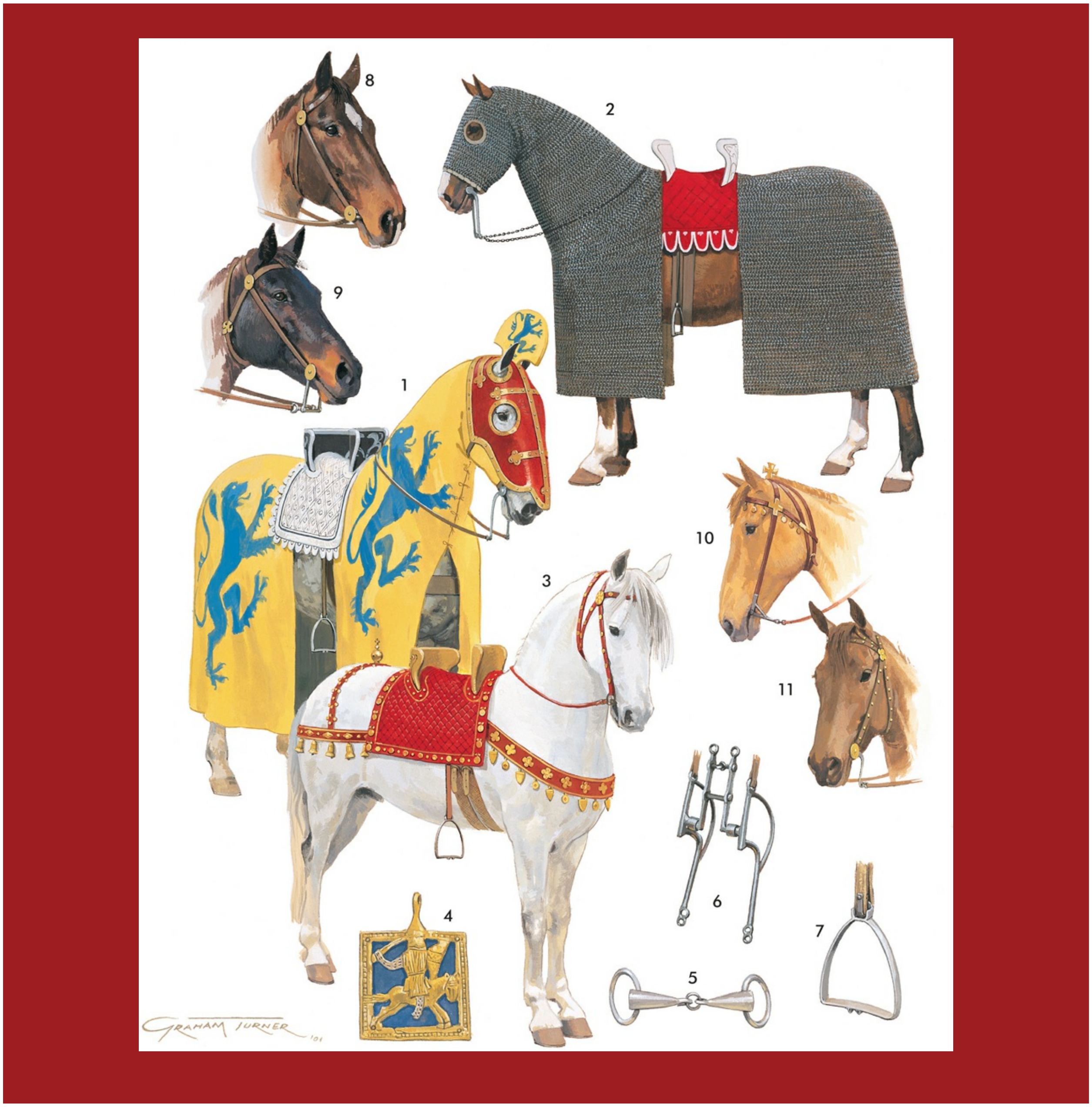
PREPARATION FOR KNIGHTHOOD

Training began when about ten years old, though in some cases it could be when as young as seven. As a page, the new recruit would be taught how to keep ladies company, how to sing and dance and recite poetry. He would start to handle practice weapons and learn about horses. When about 14 years old, the boy graduated to the role of squire, the word being derived from the French *ecuyer*, meaning a shield bearer. The youth now trained in earnest with weapons. He cut at the pell or wooden post, wrestled with and practised against other squires or knights. When pulled on a wooden horse by comrades, or mounted on a real horse, he tried to keep his seat when his lance rammed the quintain, a post on which was fixed a shield. Some had a pivoting arm, with a shield at one end and a weighted sack at the other; if a strike was made the rider had to pass swiftly by in order to avoid the swinging weight.

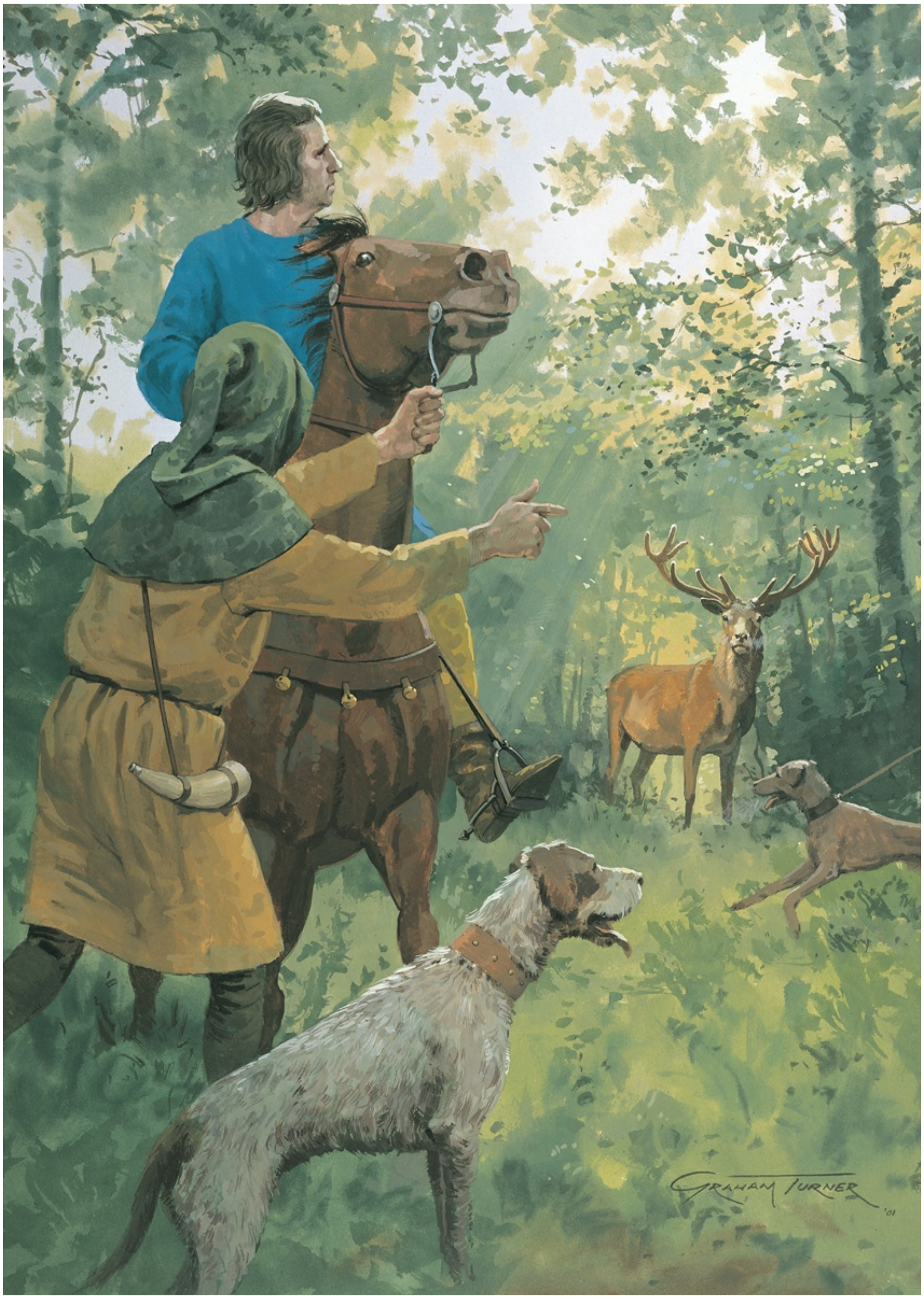
The youth came to know how to control the high-spirited stallions that knights rode. He learned to control the horse with his feet and knees when the reins were dropped so he could slip his arm through the enarmes of the shield for close combat. He became used to the weight of the mail coat and to the sensation of wearing a helm over mail and padding. He learned to swing up over the high-backed cantle of the saddle while wearing all his equipment. As well as acquiring these skills, he was now apprenticed to a knight, who might have several squires depending on his status. He had to look after the armour, cleaning mail by kicking it round in a barrel containing sand and vinegar, to scour between the links. Helmets needed polishing and oiling if they were in store. He helped look after the horses and ordered the knight's baggage.

HORSES

Horses were essential to a knight, and included a warhorse, the destrier or courser, a good riding horse, the palfrey, and rounceys for squires or servants. Sumpters for baggage, or wagon horses, were also needed. 1) The warhorse is shown in a full caparison (a cloth covering for protection or decoration, also called a trapper). 2) A mail trapper and chain reins to prevent cutting. 3) Palfrey with harness decorated with pendants and bells. 4) Harness pendant with backplate secured by a rivet at each corner. 5) Snaffle bit. 6) Curb bit, Museum of London. 7) Stirrup. 8) Bridle with snaffle. 9–11) Bridle styles with curb bits, *c*.1250.



As he grew older he also had to follow his lord into battle. In many cases this duty was probably carried out as described in the 13th-century Rule of the Templars, where each knight had two squires. On the march they went ahead of the knight, weighed down with equipment and with the led horses. As the knights drew up for battle, one squire stood in front of his master with his lance and shield, the other in the rear with the horses. When battle was imminent the first squire passed the lance and shield to his master. The second withdrew with the horses. When the knights charged, the squire riding the spare warhorse followed after his master, to remount him if the first horse was killed or blown. The squire's job was also to extricate his master from the press if wounded.



THE HUNT: Deer were sometimes hunted from horseback: evidence suggests that a deer was picked out, then relays of hounds set along paths the quarry would likely take. When the beast was brought to bay, it was usual to wait for the lord to kill the animal by a sword-thrust through the shoulder into the heart.

Some squires were required to care for their lord as a manservant would. The squire learned how to bring in the more important dishes at dinner and to carve them in public. He was taught to hunt in the field, a good exercise, and the arts of falconry and venery, including how to ‘break’ a kill. To kill deer a squire or knight sometimes handled a bow or, less likely, a crossbow, though he would not use these on the battlefield. Some might be given lessons by a clerk or priest, though many were still illiterate.

KNIGHTHOOD

Somewhere between the ages of 18 and 21, the successful squire was initiated into the ranks of knighthood. Any knight could bestow this honour, but it usually fell to the lord of the squire’s household or even the king if the boy was at court. Sometimes knights were made on the battlefield before action, being expected to fight hard but also able to lead men. Simon de Montfort knighted the young Earl of Leicester and his companions before the battle of Lewes in 1264. Sometimes a squire might be knighted after a battle, a reward for valiant deeds. Usually, however, the process entailed a costly ceremony with all the trimmings, an increasingly onerous burden on many families, since a feast would be expected and perhaps a tournament as well. The church had by now become inextricably involved with the ideas of chivalry and knighthood, though it could never achieve such a hold over the creation of knights as it had with the crowning of kings, simply because too many knights were of only modest means and could not afford any great proceedings.

Sir John Dalyngrigge built Bodiam Castle in Sussex in 1385 against the threat of French attacks, which never materialized. It is of square plan, with domestic buildings along the inner walls. The lower parts of the walls are served by early gun loops. (jans canon/CC BY 2.0)

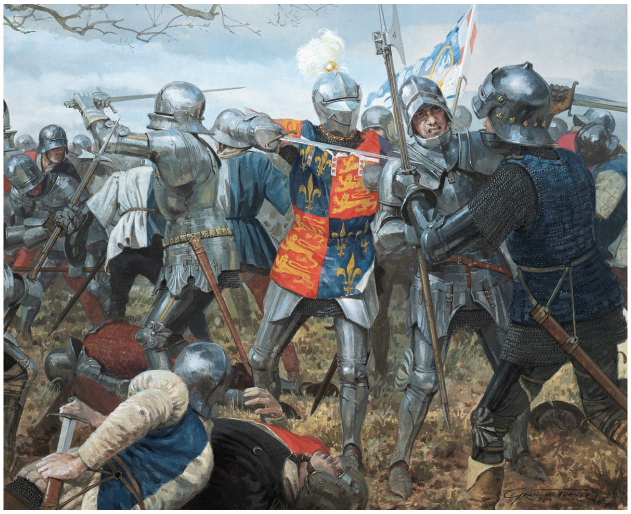
A full-blown ceremony would often include many or all of the following elements. The hair and beard (if worn) were trimmed. The day before the ceremony the candidate had a bath, from which he arose clean, a reflection on baptism. He might stand vigil in the chapel all night, his sword laid on the altar, so that he could spend the time in prayer and thoughtful meditation. The young man was then clothed, the meaning of the symbolic colours and accoutrements being explained in a French poem written between 1220 and 1225: a white tunic for purity; a scarlet cloak to represent the blood he is ready to spill in defence of the church; brown stockings, representing the earth that he will return to in time, an eventuality for which he must always be prepared; a white belt symbolizing purity; gilded spurs showing that he would be as swift as a spurred horse in obeying God's commands; the two edges of his sword symbolizing justice and loyalty, and the obligation to defend the weak; the cross-guard echoing the cross of Christ. The candidate progressed to the assembled throng, for with no written certificate, even low-key ceremonies needed witnesses. His sword was belted on and spurs set on his feet.

The aspirant was then knighted by a tap on the shoulders with a sword, or perhaps still by the buffet often given previously, a symbolic blow that was the only one the new knight had to receive without retaliation. On the other hand, it may have symbolized the awakening from evil dreams and henceforth the necessity to keep the faith (as mentioned in a prayer book of 1295). Alternatively, it might have been to remember the knight who delivered it. It may even have derived from the habit of boxing the ears of young witnesses to charters to make sure they remembered the occasion, but it is not certain. Words of encouragement and wisdom were exchanged, along the lines of protecting the church, the poor, the weak and women, and refraining from treason. The new knight then displayed his prowess, sometimes in a tournament, and there was celebrating. A number of squires were sometimes knighted together.

Squires were sometimes knighted before a battle, producing new knights keen to fight bravely to uphold their honour, and as they might be needed to lead troops – something squires were not supposed to do. Edward III made new knights before a raid into Scotland in 1335. Knighting could also be performed after a battle, such as at Crécy in 1346, when Edward III declined to send help to his hard-pressed son, the Black Prince, telling the messenger to let the boy win his spurs, which he did.

By 1500, times had changed. Men of knightly rank did not always wish to fight, and not everyone had come from a background of mounted warriors. There were plenty of other activities, such as running estates, farming, mercantile interests in towns, local government and attending parliament as knights of the shire. Some were naturally attracted to the battlefield, however.

ARMOUR AND WEAPONS



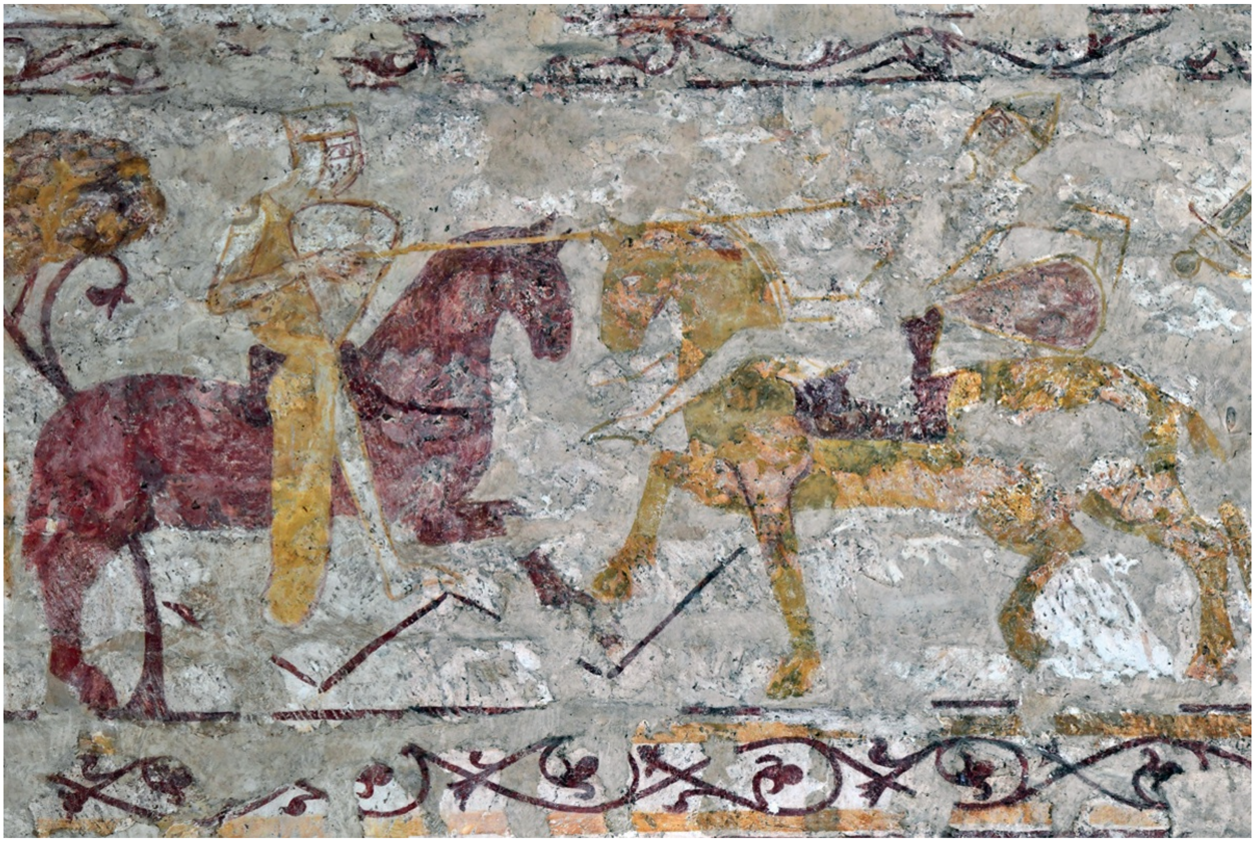
THE BATTLE OF WAKEFIELD, 30 DECEMBER 1460: Richard, Duke of York brought an army north against the newly raised forces of Henry VI's queen, Margaret of Anjou. The duke, shown in an Italian armour with tabard over it, was killed in the resulting battle. His young son, the Earl of Rutland, caught fleeing by Lord Clifford, was personally stabbed by him.

ARMOUR

MAIL

The commonest body armour of the 13th-century knight was mail, consisting of interlinked iron rings made up into garments. Despite the amount of mail that was undoubtedly in use, little has survived in any quantity dating from before the late 14th or early 15th centuries and none of that which does survive is of English manufacture. For the most part we are thrown back on manuscript illustrations and sculpted figures to reconstruct the knight of the period.

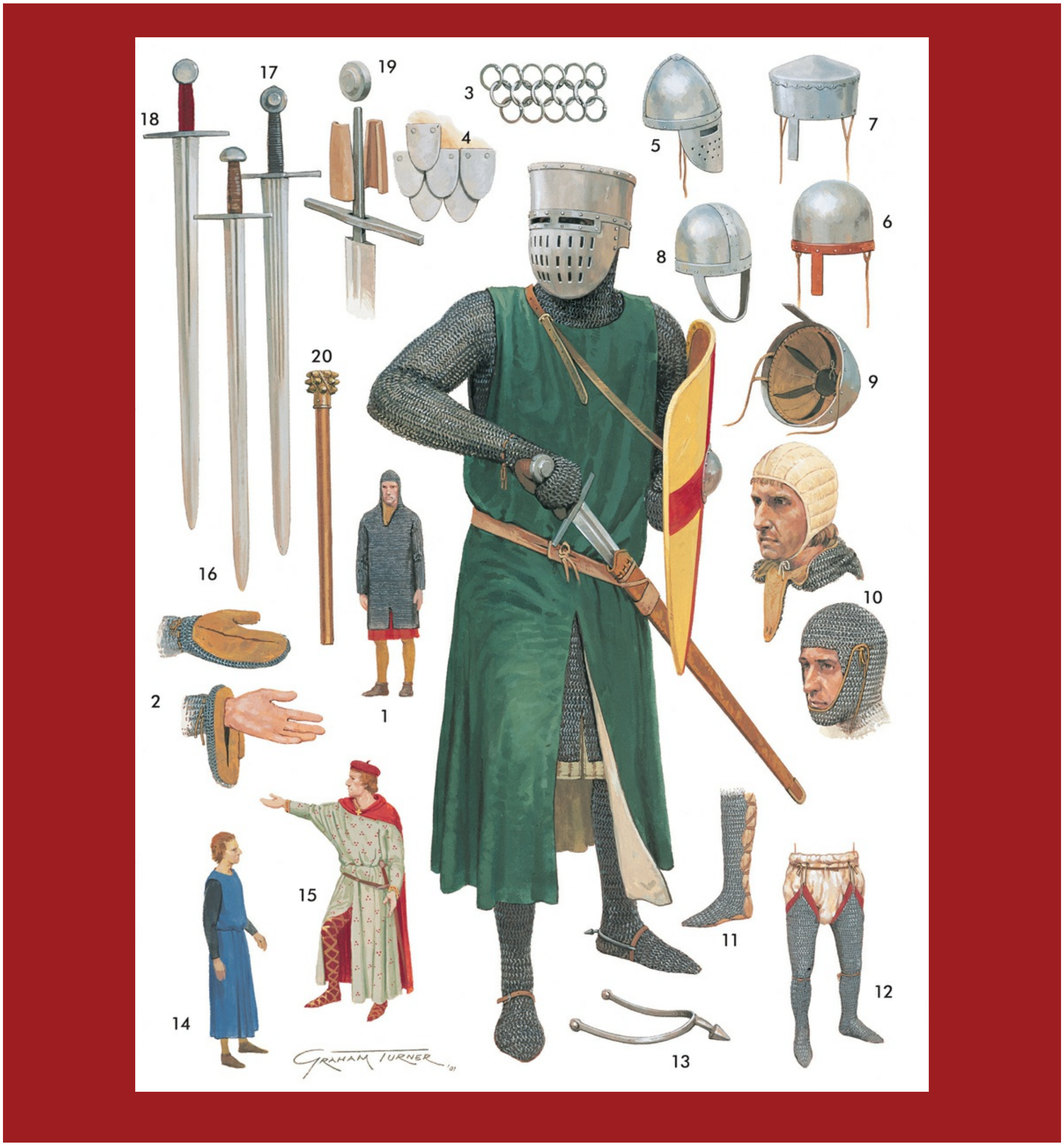
The process by which mail was made has largely been lost but certain procedures must have been necessary. First wire would be drawn through a board with holes of varying diameter to arrive at the correct thickness. The wire was then wound round a rod and cut down one side to produce individual rings. Each was flattened at the ends to allow a tiny hole to be pierced, before being interlinked with four other rings. The open ends were overlapped and secured by hammering a tiny rivet cut from a sheet. This process had to be done thousands of times to produce a single coat. It is likely that a workshop included men who drew wire and cut out the rings ready for assembly, this being done by the mail-maker. It required a knowledge of how to add or subtract rings to expand or narrow a garment and to allow an arm to be lowered without bunching in the armpit. The finished garment might be case-hardened by packing charcoal around it in a charcoal fire. Whether special tools were produced to speed up the process is not known for certain. In some cases alternate lines of riveted and welded rings may have been used, but this form was rare by the 15th century and it was far more usual for all rings to be riveted.



Detail of a wall painting from All Saints Church, Claverley, Shropshire, probably executed around the turn of the 13th century and most likely depicting the battle between Vices and Virtues. The knights, some in surcoats, wear flat-topped, round or conical helmets, with rather crudely painted face-masks. (Michael-Garlick/CC BY-SA 2.0)

KNIGHT, *c.*1210

The central figure wears a mail coat as a main body-defence. It reaches his knees, while the arms extend to form mail mittens. Beneath can be seen a vertically quilted aketon (padded tunic). 1) Mail coat. 2) Mail mufflers or mittens. 3) Interlinked riveted mail rings. 4) Iron scale armour. 5) Helmet fitted with face mask. 6) Rounded style of helmet. 7) Cylindrical style, here with a nasal (defence for the nose). 8) Chin-defence. 9) Conical helmet with conjectural padded lining. 10) Mail coif thrown back to show padded arming cap and lined aventail. 11) Strip of mail to guard leg. 12) Mail chausses over hose, and tied to waist belt. 13) Iron prick spur; the leather is bolted to the terminal, *c.*1200–1300. 14) Surcoat worn as a super-tunic. 15) Long tunic with Magyar sleeves. 16) Sword, *c.*1200 or earlier. 17) Sword, *c.*1200–1300. 18) Sword, *c.*1200–1300. 19) Exploded view of sword hilt to show wooden two-part grip. 20) Mace with moulded copper-alloy head, *c.*1200.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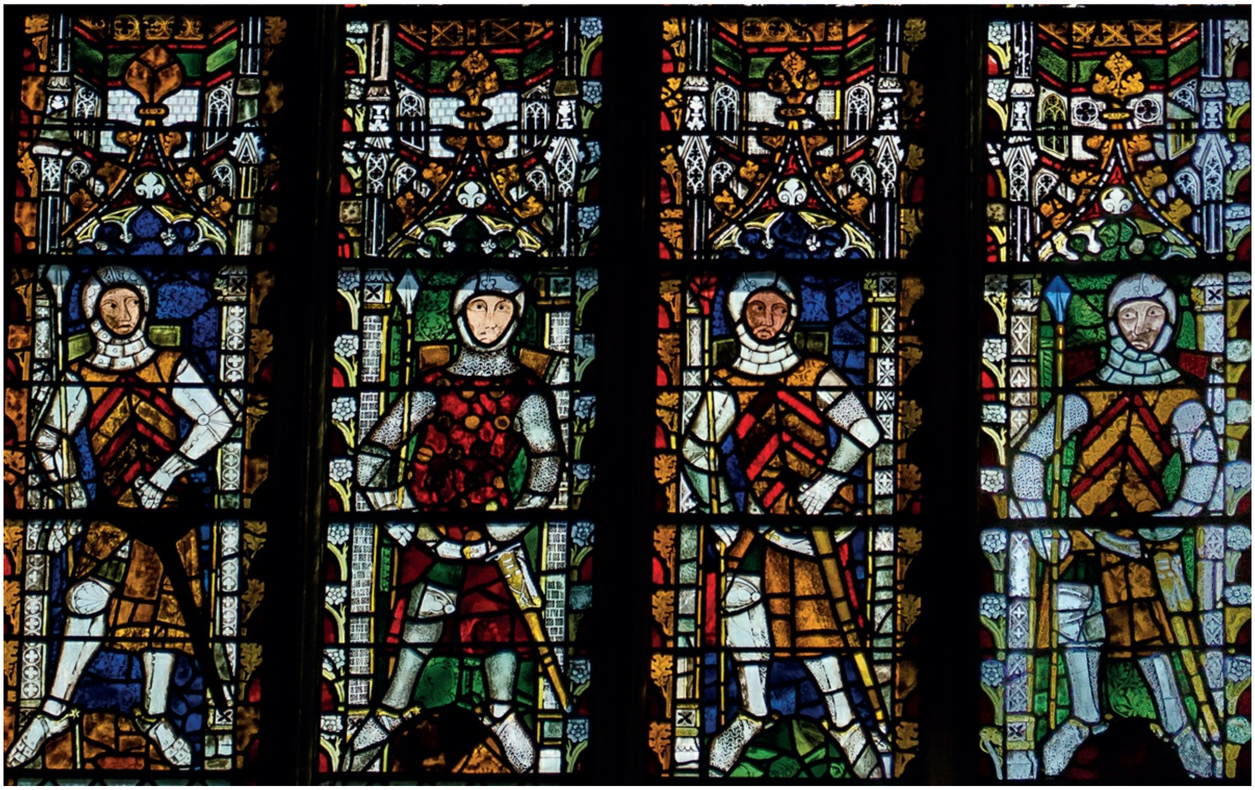
GRAHAM TURNER '01

The mail coat was called a hauberk. This was usually about knee-length or a little shorter, split up the fork a short distance to facilitate riding, with wrist-length sleeves extended over the hands to form mail mufflers, or mittens. The neck was extended up to form a hood or coif. To guard the throat, the slit below the chin, which facilitated putting on the coat, might be laced shut. However, it was more common to extend one side of the lower edge of the hood as a flap of mail that could be drawn up across the chin and often the mouth when action was expected. This was called a ventail, and was probably usually lined or padded for comfort. In order to secure it, a lace might be threaded through the rings at the temple to keep the hood in place, tied through the rings on the ventail. Some were fitted instead with a buckle to secure through a strap, or possibly a hook. A padded and quilted coif or arming cap was worn under the mail, tied under the chin with laces. By about 1275 some knights had begun to wear a separate mail coif, but integral coifs remained equally if not more popular throughout the rest of the century.

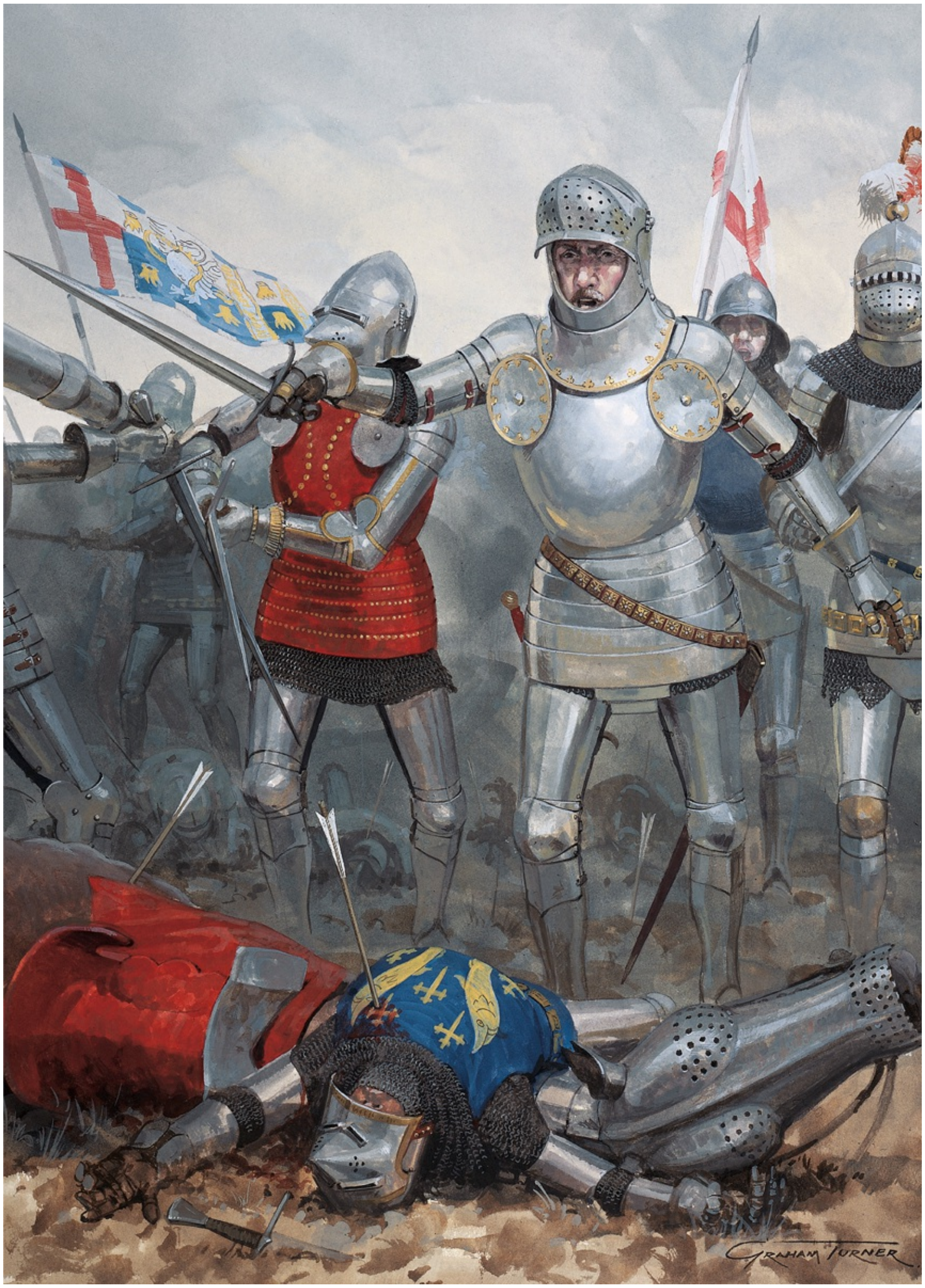


A window of around 1340 in the choir of Tewkesbury Abbey depicting armoured men. All wear plate gauntlets, but only the left-hand figure has full vambraces (arm defences), this figure also possessing complete greaves. Instead of mail at the throat, three have what appears to be a defence in coat of plates style. All have ailettes shown standing up at the back, presumably an artistic style to display them. (J. Guffogg & J.Hannan/CC BY 2.0)

A mail coat weighed roughly 30lb (13.6kg), depending on its length and the thickness of the rings. Some slightly shorter versions were also seen, with three-quarter or elbow-length sleeves, and are very probably the form known as a haubergeon. In about 1250 Matthew Paris depicts a cuffed gauntlet made separately from the sleeve of the mail coat, but such an item was rare until the following century. At this date it appears to have been a form of bag gauntlet of leather with a flaring cuff, or a form reinforced by whalebone or metal plates inside or outside a leather or canvas mitten.

The legs were covered by chausses (mail stockings), fitted with leather soles to aid grip and braced up to a belt at the waist, rather like the cloth stockings worn underneath. A leather belt was probably used to anchor them with ties, rather than bracing them to the girdle of the braies (drawers). A further tie laced through the links below the knee might be used to prevent sagging. Sometimes a strip of mail was worn over the front of the leg and foot instead, this being secured with lacing and presumably held up in a similar fashion to a waist belt.

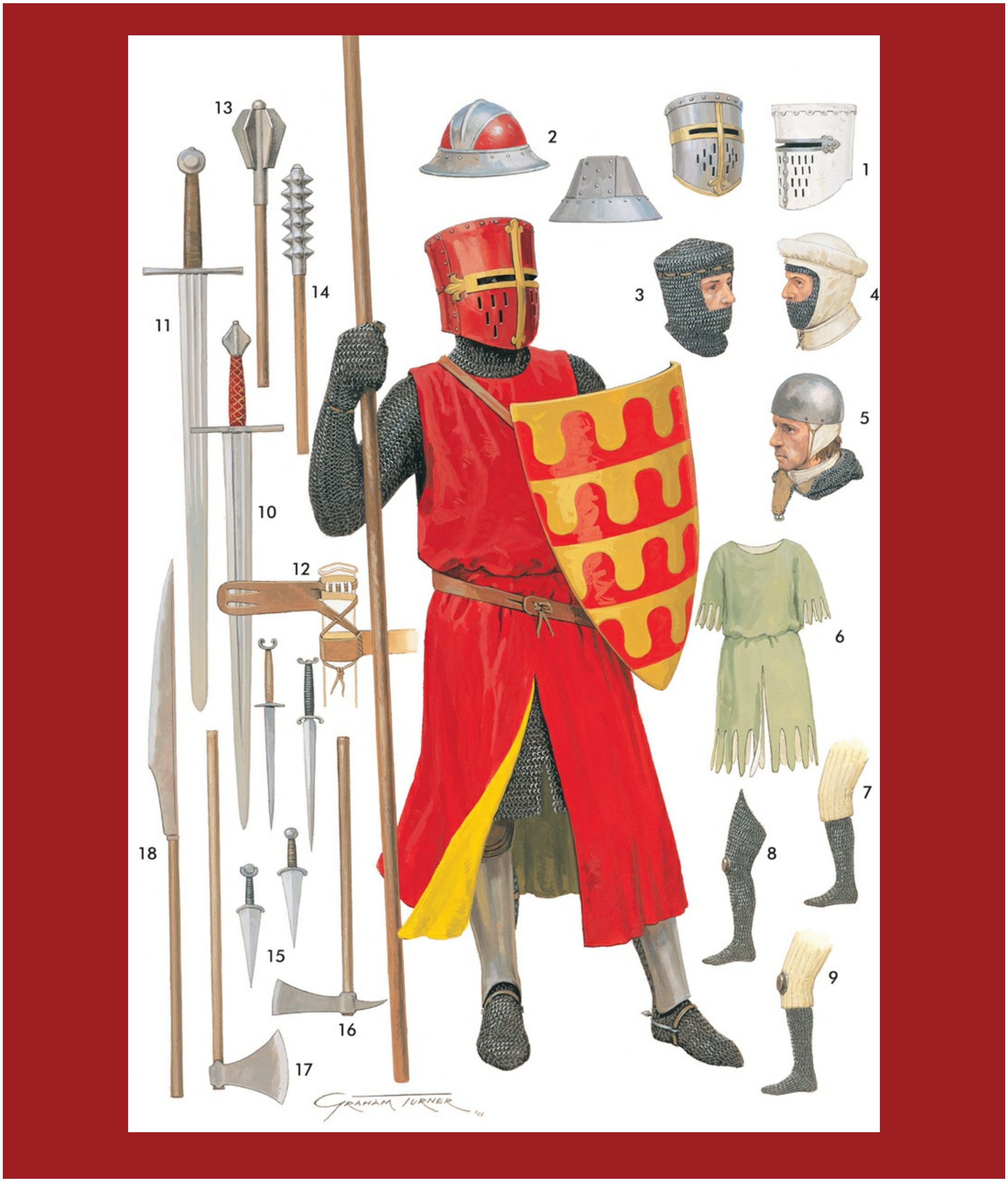
By about 1225 the gamboised cuisse appeared to protect the thigh and knee, and took the form of a quilted padded tube, presumably tied to the same belt as the chausses. By mid-century small cup-shaped pieces called genouilliers (also known as poleyns) were occasionally worn over the knees, either attached directly to the mail chausses or else over the gamboised cuisses. At first they were small, but soon larger versions appeared that wrapped around the sides of the knee as well. Some may have been made from cuir bouilli (a hard but light material made by moulding leather that has been boiled or soaked in water or oil) and they may have been laced or stitched in place or else riveted through the mail. Very rarely, a similar small cup-shaped piece was seen at the elbow. Shin-defences, called schynbalds, were simple gutter-shaped plates strapped around the leg over the mail.



AGINCOURT, 25 OCTOBER 1415: The struggle following the defeated French cavalry charges when both sides fought on foot. A steel-tipped arrow has bored into the breastplate of a French knight; even steel armour was not always effective against them.

KNIGHT, *c*.1250

This knight still wears the mail coat as his main body-defence, but in addition solid schynbalds over the mail chausses protect the shins and poleyns guard the knees. 1) Helms, from statues on Wells Cathedral, *c*.1230–40. 2) Two forms of kettle hat. 3) Shaped arming cap for a helm worn under the mail. 4) Arming cap with padded roll and a solid collar. 5) Buckled padded ventail, covered collar, and cervellière (small iron skull-cap) worn over arming cap. 6) Sleeved surcoat with dagged edges. 7) Gamboised cuisse, which would be tied to a waist belt. 8) Poleyn attached to mail. 9) Poleyn attached to gamboised cuisse. 10) Sword from the Ouse at Ely. 11) Great sword, *c*.1250–1300. 12) Scabbard detail. 13) Flanged mace. 14) Knobbed mace. 15) Various styles of dagger. 16) Horseman’s axe. 17) Long axe. 18) Short glaive.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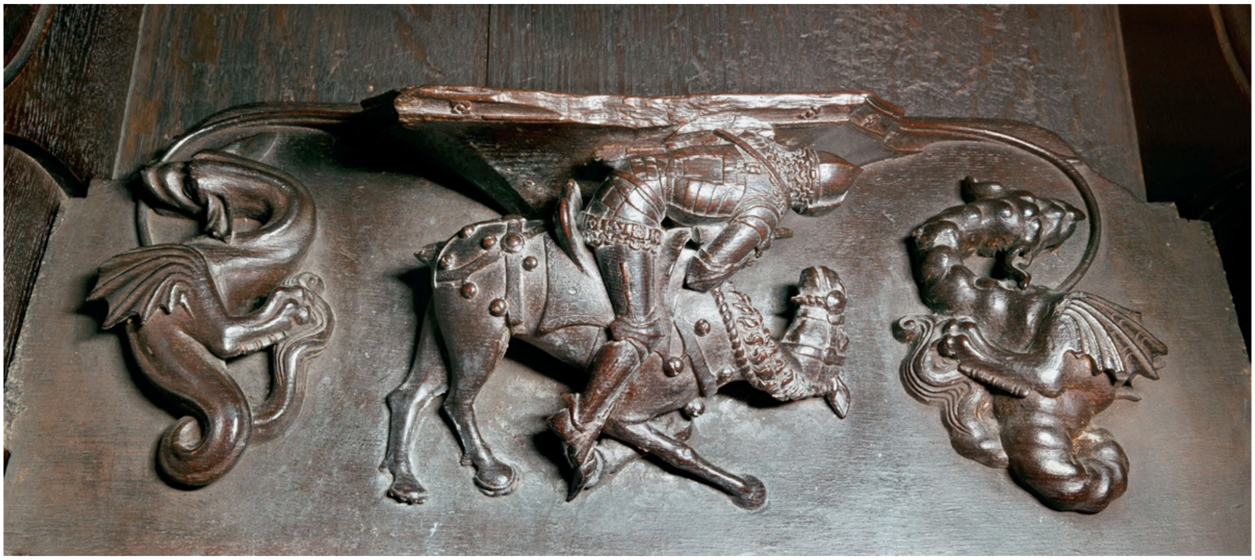
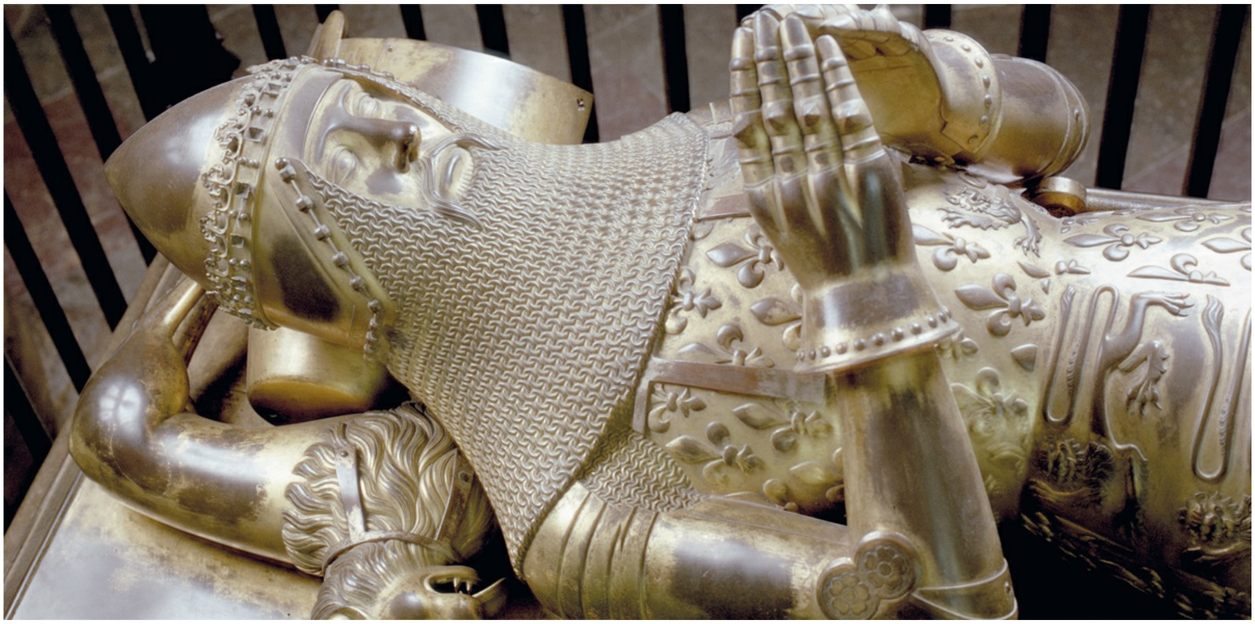
Graham Turner

It is likely that a padded tunic, known as the aketon (from the Arabic *al-qutun* for ‘cotton’), wambais, pourpoint or gambeson, was worn under the mail. Though mail moves easily, its very flexibility means that a powerful blow can result in bruising or even broken bones without the links being torn. If mail links were cut, they could be driven back into the wound, increasing the likelihood of septicaemia. In the early 13th century, Guillaume le Breton, writing of a fight some years before between William de Barres and the future Richard I, describes the lances piercing shield, hauberk and aketon. Gerald de Barri, writing in the late 12th century, mentions a leather tunic worn under mail, which may have been an alternative to an aketon. Padded aketons seem to have consisted of two layers of cotton stuffed with wool, cotton, old rags or similar, and held in place by vertical, or occasionally trellis, stitching. Later versions are known to have been made from numerous thicknesses of linen, and this may have been an alternative style. Some examples worn by infantry in illustrations in the mid-13th-century French *Maciejowski Bible* seem to have inset sleeves, since nowhere do they vary in colour to suggest a sleeved coat under a sleeveless version (although gambesons are sometimes referred to as being worn over an aketon). However, it is not known if examples worn beneath mail were similar. Some gambesons, perhaps those mentioned as made of silks and other rich materials, were occasionally worn over mail and, at the end of the century, over the coat of plates.



A falling knight, struck by a crossbow bolt, carved on a 14th-century misericord in Lincoln Cathedral. It affords a rare back view of a coat of plates, the sides held by buckled straps. (akg-images/A.F. Kersting)

In a few instances a mail coat is shown with a long flowing garment issuing from below the hem, in much the same way as was seen in the 12th century. This is far too fluid to be a padded coat, and in any case is also occasionally seen under civilian tunics. The description by Guillaume le Breton also mentions a plate of worked iron worn under the aketon, presumably over the heart. No illustration of such a defence is known.



The effigy of Edward, the Black Prince (died 1376) in Canterbury Cathedral. Depicted on the tomb chest is also a black shield with white ostrich feathers, his 'shield of peace' for jousts, which probably gave rise to the name 'Black Prince'. (RDImages/Epics/Getty Images)

However, by mid-century, glimpses of additional body defences begin to appear. An effigy at Pershore Abbey in Worcestershire and another in the Temple Church, London, show that some form of breast and backplates are buckled over the mail but under the surcoat. It is not known whether iron, steel or cuir bouilli is intended. Examples of some form of leather body armour, the cuirie, with or without additional metal pieces, appear to be worn by infantrymen in several 13th-century manuscripts, laced at about two points down the side.

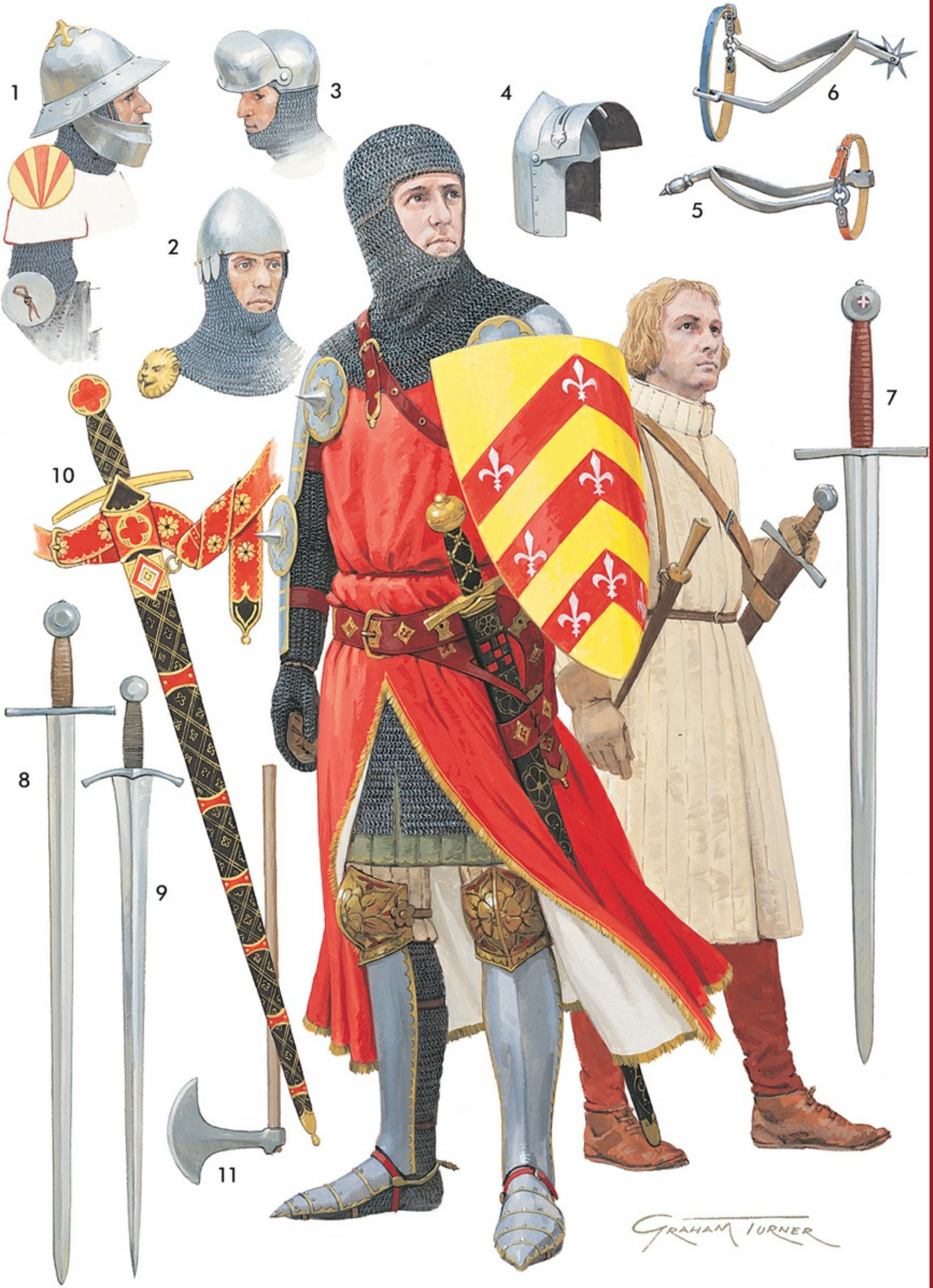
It is possible that the upwardly curved shoulders seen in the *Maciejowski Bible* example and some instances of surcoats with similar shoulders may be explained by some form of leather armour, though this shape could equally be achieved by stiffening the surcoat material. The inventory of Fawkes de Bréauté of 1224 mentions 'an espaulier' of black cendal silk (a silk textile resembling coarse sarsenet), perhaps a padded shoulder piece of some kind. It is also possible that a large upper chest piece or collar produced the shaped shoulder. However, collars of a certain form do appear on a number of illustrations, worn over the mail or else beneath, visible when the ventail is loosed and the coif is flung back on the shoulders. They appear to be covered in cloth but it is not clear if they are of iron or whalebone, as sometimes mentioned; a few may simply be quilted. Equally it is not clear if they are all separate or whether some were attached to the aketon, as shown when worn by footsoldiers. It is not known how they articulated, but it seems that they either fastened at both sides or hinged on the wearer's left and were laced on the right side. At the end of the century a plate defence for the chin and neck, the gorget or bevor, was known in France and possibly England.

SURCOAT

The surcoat was a cloth garment worn over armour. It appears to have been introduced in the second quarter of the 12th century and was increasingly popular by the early 13th century, though even towards mid-century by no means all knights wore one. The length varied from above the knee down to the ankles, and the skirts were split front and rear almost up to the waist for ease in riding. Its main purpose is not clear, suggestions varying from keeping the armour dry or out of sunlight, to copying Muslim fashion or for displaying heraldry. The latter is the least persuasive: the surcoat was frequently left in a single colour which appears to bear little relation to a family's coat-of-arms. As for other aspects of their design, most appear to have been lined in a contrasting colour. They were usually secured at the waist by a plaited cord or decorative belt, which also helped to hitch up the mail beneath and ease the weight on the shoulders. A few surcoats may have been lined over the chest with plates.

KNIGHT AND EQUIPMENT, *c.*1330

At the beginning of the 14th century, knights differed little from those at the end of the previous century, and it was not until about 1325–30 that the use of plate armour became increasingly common. 1) Kettle hat and bevor. 2) This knight has a small basinet with riveted aventail and pendant flaps covering the joints. 3) Visored basinet. 4) Visored helm. 5) Late prick spur from the brass of Sir Robert de Septvans. 6) Reconstructed tinned rowel spur. 7) Hand-and-a-half sword, first half of 14th century. 8) Sword of first half of 14th century. 9) Sword, *c.*1290–1330; the style of cross was uncommon after 1300. 10) Sword belt fastening, using hook-and-eye attachments. 11) Axe.



HELMETS

Several varieties of helmet were in use. The conical form was either raised from a single piece of iron or steel, sometimes with reinforcing bands, or else made in the form of the old Germanic *spangenhelm*, from four segments riveted inside a framework of iron bands, usually four springing from a brow band. Such helmets would still be seen in mid-century, but in art they are sometimes ascribed to the ‘baddies’, emphasizing the more up-to-date equipment of the ‘good guys’. By 1200 round and cylindrical variants were already popular. All three forms might have a nasal, but are sometimes provided with a face mask. A few had a neck-guard, and in the late 12th century the two were joined to produce a rudimentary form of the great helm. This form, rare in 1200, was usually shallower at the rear than at the front, though the second seal of Richard I suggests that helms reaching the same depth all round were known before 1200.

The all-enclosing helm became increasingly popular through the 13th century. Some had a single vision-slit across the front, and gradually reinforcing bars were added to strengthen the metal around the slits and down the medial line at the front. The front plates overlapped those in the rear to afford a smoother surface against a weapon point. The flat top was riveted over the upper edges. This form of top surface was much less protective than conical or even round-topped helmets, but nevertheless remained the usual form until later in the century. After about 1250 the upper sides began to taper, though the top usually remained flat. From about 1275 a few tapered to a point and by the end of the century round-topped examples were also seen. The lower edges had also deepened and by 1300 the first visors may have appeared.

By the mid-13th century, the cervellière (also known at this date as a basinet), a small, hemispherical skull cap of iron, had become popular and increasingly supplanted the conical and round-topped helmets. Sometimes worn over the mail hood but under the helm, illustrations reveal that it could also be worn under the hood but over the padded coif, and would account for a number of pictures showing warriors apparently wearing very rounded coifs and seemingly no other head-defence. Such hoods often show a lace around the temples, either to keep the mail in place or also to help secure the cervellière.

All helmets were fitted with a padded lining, though representations at this date are virtually non-existent. Surviving 14th-century linings and representations in art suggest linings were typically of canvas padded with horse or cow hair, tow, wool, grass or something similar, either glued inside the helmet, or else secured by stitching to a line of small holes along the helmet rim, or else to a leather or canvas band riveted inside the brim, the band held by crude square or rectangular washers. The upper part was probably scalloped and a draw string threaded through the top ends of each scallop to adjust for fit. This was particularly important once the face was covered, since the vision-slits needed to align with the eyes whenever the helmet was donned. The lining of a great helm did not extend down over the face plates, as this would cover the ventilation holes. Helmets were laced or occasionally buckled in place under the chin; laces (some probably bifurcated) were secured either to one of the rivets or else to a flattened hook or loop inside the brim.

In the later 12th century helmet crests had appeared, usually on the helm – Richard I is shown with one on his second seal. The fan crest was sometimes made from thin metal, though wood and parchment were also used, especially for tournament versions. The fan could be painted with the coat-of-arms or some part of it. Three-dimensional crests were also sometimes used, made from whalebone or, more commonly, wood, parchment or leather. Manuscript illustrations and references show that some helmets might simply have been painted.

SHIELD

A shield was carried since this provided a solid defence as opposed to the flexible defence of the mail coat. Made from wooden planks and faced with leather or parchment, most were probably lined with parchment, cloth or leather as well. No English shield from this period survives, and Continental examples come from churches, perhaps being specially made for this purpose, so it is not certain whether coverings such as gesso and moulding would usually have been used on war shields. The wood tends to be about ⅗in. (1.5cm) thick. There are usually three brases or enarmes (carrying straps) riveted through to the front; illustrations sometimes show buckles to adjust their length. In order to prevent bruising to the forearm a pad was nailed between the straps. In addition, a guige strap allowed the shield to hang from the neck (or with only the forearm through the brases) in the charge or to prevent loss in battle, or allowed the shield to be strapped to the back or hung up when not in use. Rarely a buckler, a small circular wooden shield with a central metal boss over a hand grip, may have been used.

THE TRANSITION TO PLATE ARMOUR

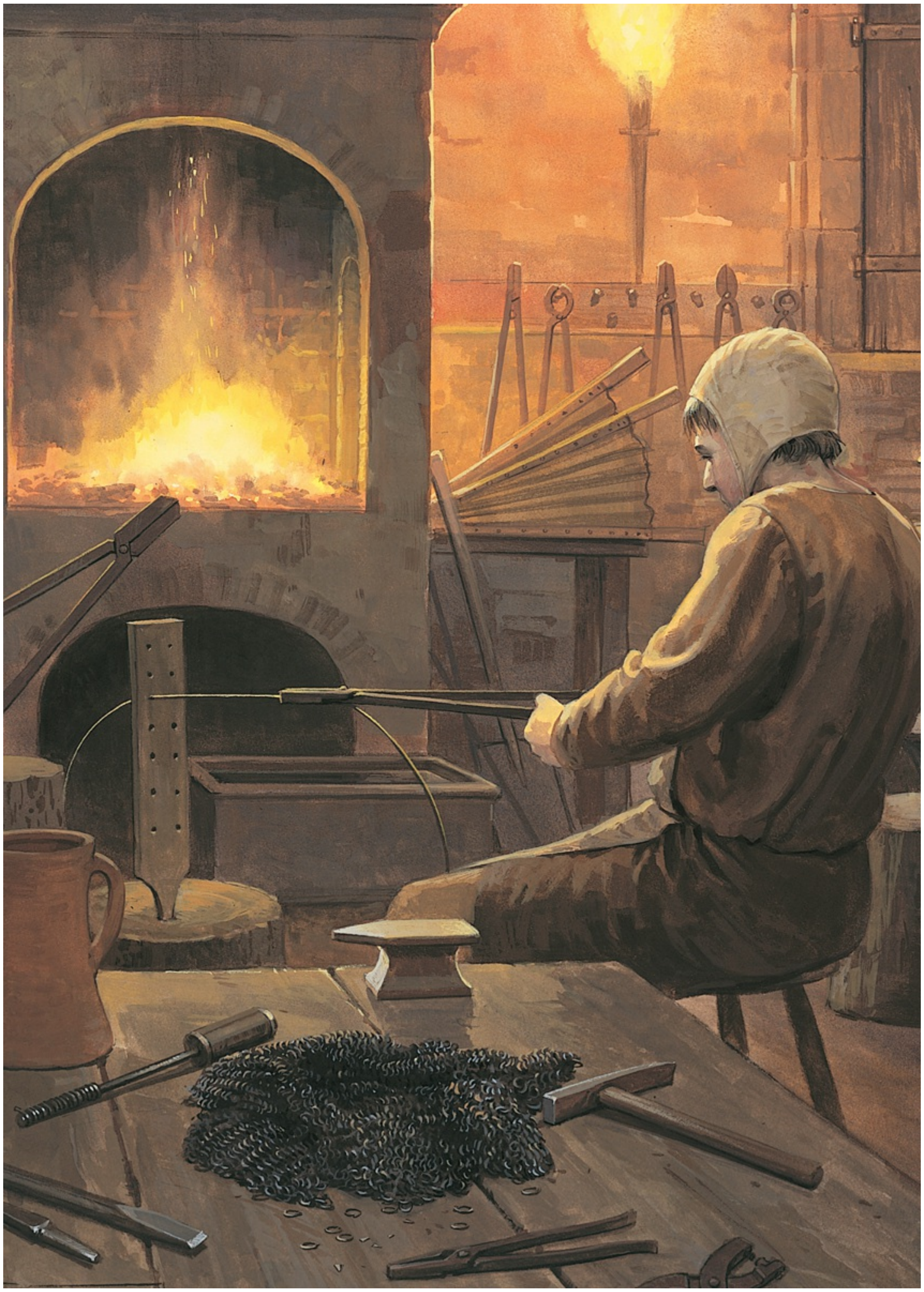
The 14th century saw the greatest change in the armour of the medieval knight. In 1300 the main body armour was mail; by 1400 most knights were completely protected by plates of steel. Mail would continue to be the predominant defence well into the 14th century, however.

Plate armour was beginning to become popular in 1300. From around 1320 the most commonly mentioned item is the coat of plates, also called the pair of plates, hauberk of plates, *côte à plates*, or ‘plates’. This consisted of a poncho-like garment lined with an arrangement of plates which were riveted inside the cloth over the front of the body. Vertical plates lined the side flaps, which were tied or buckled at the back, perhaps additionally laced to the back flap by a ring at each upper corner. The coat of plates was usually worn over the mail but under the surcoat, making it difficult to see at this period.

MAKING PLATE ARMOUR

The armourer needed new skills to make plate armour. Plates were shaped over an armourer's anvil embedded in a tree trunk. A controllable fire, fanned by leather bellows, was necessary for heating the metal, and controllable light sources were needed to enable the armourer to check the colour of the metal to allow him to remove it at the required time for further treatment. Mushroom-headed stakes were set into a wooden bench for shaping, much of which was done when the metal was cool. Large snips were needed to cut the steel sheets for working, but all plans of the basic flat shape, if indeed they existed, have vanished. Probably much of it was carried in the armourer's head. The shaped pieces were black from the furnace and were usually burnished and polished to a bright finish. Most would need rivets of some sort: those for attaching a lining band to which a lining was stitched; those that acted as a pivot between two plates and, towards the later 14th century, those that slid in a slot in another plate, usually on the elbow and lower cannon joint. The coat of plates used many rivets in securing it to its backing.

Occasionally, the plates were fastened over, rather than under, the cloth. Surviving examples from battle graves at Wisby in Gotland (1361) show that some coats consisted of rows of small vertical plates at the front, sides and back, with extra plates over the shoulders and scales at the armpits. One opens at the right side and right shoulder, another at the left side and both shoulders. Swiss examples open at both shoulders and were probably laced shut at the sides. The cuirie, possibly a leather body armour, is also mentioned, and 13th-century depictions suggest it was buckled at the sides, perhaps reinforced by plates. A rare example of a coat of scales over mail occurs on an effigy from the second quarter of the 14th century in the church at Moccas, Herefordshire.



MAKING MAIL ARMOUR, *c.*1150–1250: Some armour was made by groups of workmen almost as a production line, with a particular craftsman using his skills to produce a particular piece of equipment, such as buckles. This man is drawing hot iron wire through a hole in a wooden board to achieve the right thickness of mail.

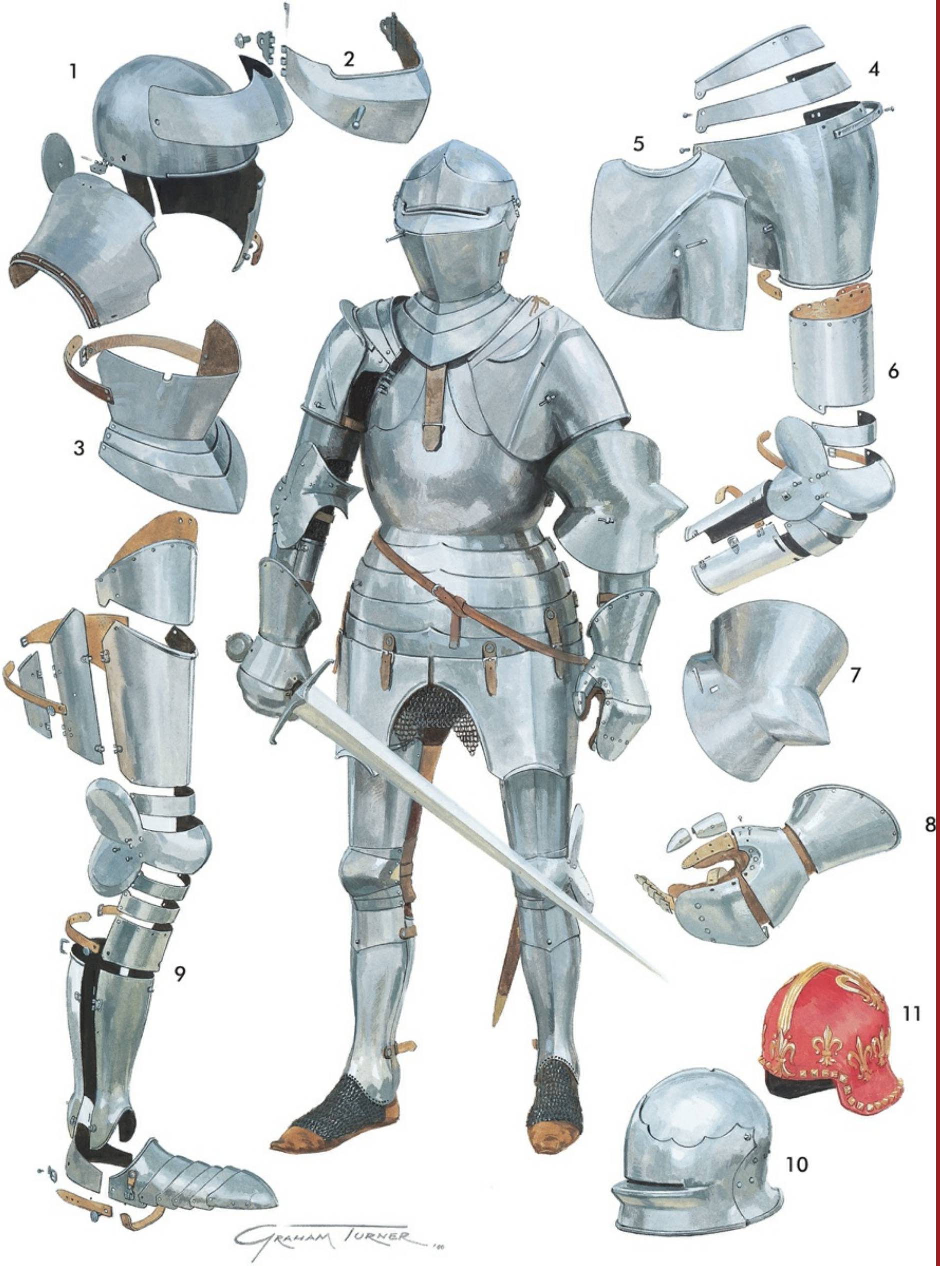
Plate leg-defences were usually restricted to poleyns over the knees, either riveted over the mail or else attached to gamboised cuisses, quilted tubes worn over the thigh and attached at the waist. A few might have schynbalds, plate shin guards, or even, rarely, a completely enclosed greave on the lower leg, hinged on the outer side and buckled shut on the inner side, to protect the leather straps. Very rarely, a plate couter was worn at the elbow.

Ailettes were flat pieces of wood, leather or parchment, mainly rectangular, more rarely circular or diamond shaped, and decorated with the knight's coat-of-arms. These flimsy items were worn on the shoulder purely for identification and show, and were discarded after about 1350.

Evidence from German effigies suggests that the breastplate began to appear in about 1340. At first it was quite short, but by the 1360s it became deeper and curved. It was fastened to the inside of the coat by two semicircles of rivets, with narrow waist lames (narrow plates of steel that enabled articulation) with the wider hoops below these. Another form of breastplate appeared in the 1370s, less globular and with a notable medial ridge.

ITALIAN ARMOUR, *c.*1450

The main picture is based on the Milanese harness in the Scott Collection in Glasgow, with its missing pieces restored and the barbut replaced by an armet. 1) The armet opened; it is fitted with a padded lining of hay, wool or tow, stitched to a lining-band riveted inside. 2) The visor is removed by withdrawing the side pins. 3) A wrapper can be strapped over the visor and cheek-pieces. 4) A stop-rib is riveted to the main plate of the pauldron (shoulder defence); the plates above articulate on pivoting rivets. 5) A gardbrace attaches to each pauldron by a staple and pin, the left being much larger. 6) The lames of the couter attach on pivoting rivets, to prevent gaps appearing when the arm is bent. The lower cannon is attached to the lower couter plate by a sliding rivet (moving in a slot), allowing the forearm to twist slightly. 7) The large guard of the vambrace – characteristically Italian in its size – fits over the left couter wing via a staple and pin. 8) The gauntlet has a leather glove stitched to a canvas or leather lining-band riveted inside the cuff and secured at the hand by rivets and straps. Each exposed finger end additionally has a leather strip stitched to it, on to which are riveted overlapping steel scales. The left gauntlet has one plate over the fingers, the right, which requires more flexibility for gripping weapons, has two. 9) The cuisse has a leather tongue pierced with holes to attach to the doublet. The poleyn, with large Italian side wing, has lames above and below that allow the leg to bend without exposing the limb itself. The greave is strapped on the inner side of the leg. 10) An Italian sallet, *c.*1450. 11) Italian sallet covered in velvet and decorated with gilt copper mounts, *c.*1480.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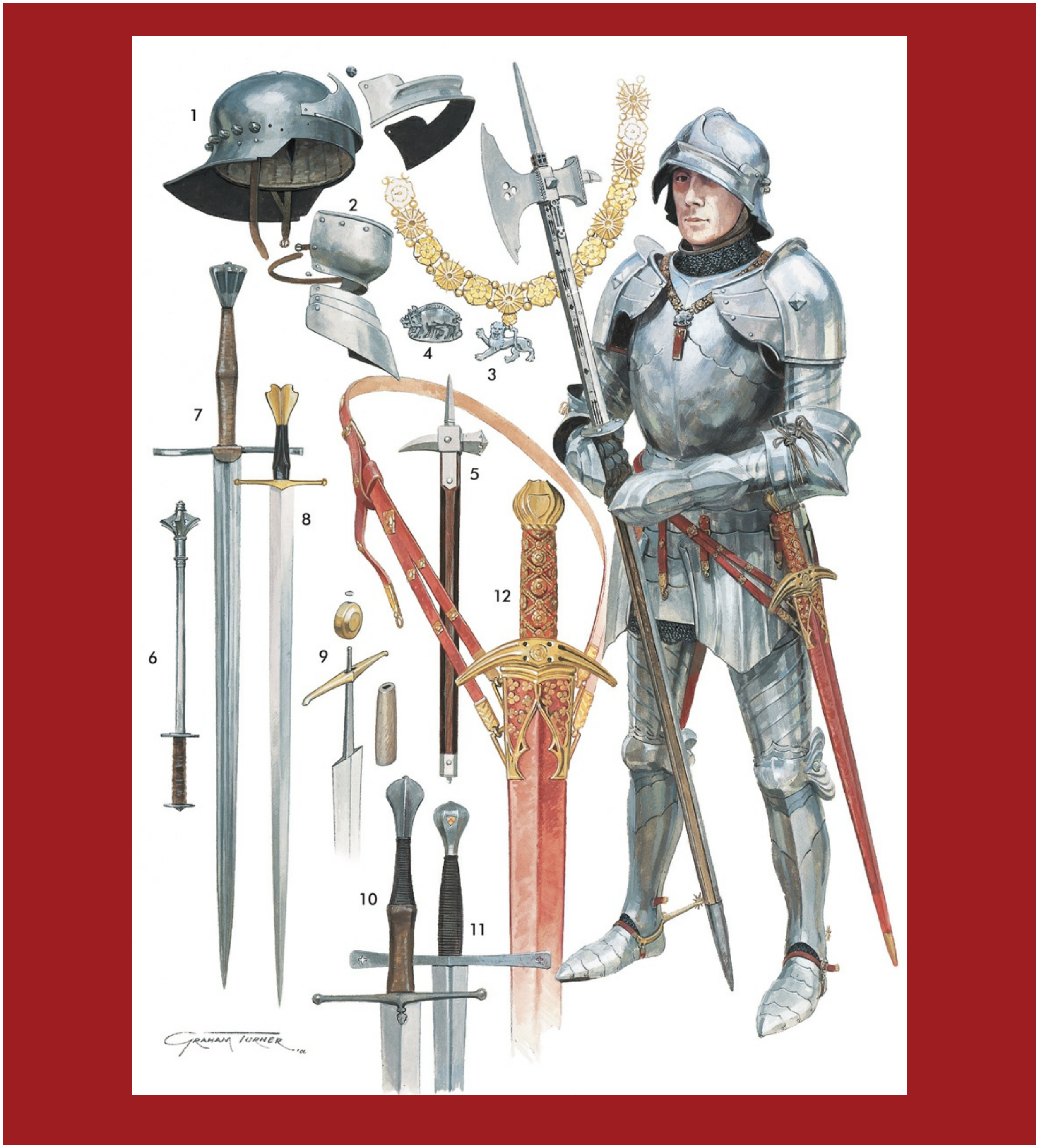
ENGLISH ARMOUR, 1450–1500

Examples of the west European armour worn in England are rare and we are thrown back on visual evidence to reconstruct it. This example may have been made in England, probably London, or imported from Flanders. Some armour might be of Italian export type, made in the style required in England. The knight carrying the pollaxe is based on the FitzHerbert effigy, of around 1475. Much of the detail is similar to that of Italian armour. 1) Sallet, *c*.1460, showing lining of canvas stuffed with hay. 2) A lined bevor, laced or stapled to the breastplate, was not always worn with the sallet. 3) Yorkist collar with lion pendant. 4) Boar pendant of Richard of Gloucester. 5) War-hammer, *c*.1450. 6) Flanged mace, *c*.1470. 7) Hand-and-a-half sword with scent-bottle pommel, *c*.1450. A membrane of leather is fitted over the cord binding. 8) Arming sword with fish-tail pommel, second half of the century. 9) Exploded view of the hilt. The wood was usually covered in leather and perhaps overlaid with cloth or leather strips, or wire. 10) Hand-and-a-half sword with scent-bottle pommel, *c*.1450. 11) Hilt with scent-bottle pommel, late 15th century. 12) Short, broad-bladed arming sword and scabbard, from effigy of Sir Robert Harcourt (died 1471).



A list of armour for the Wardrobe of Edward III drawn up for the years 1337 and 1341 refers to separate breastplates, though these, and others in Dover in 1361, are specified as for the jousts. If contemporary German effigies are anything to go by, these early breastplates were perhaps flat with curved edges, or shaped rather like an inverted heart, presumably being attached to the front of the covering by straps and buckles. An effigy on a 1340 tomb at Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, possibly shows a small, flat breastplate with a medial ridge worn under the surcoat.

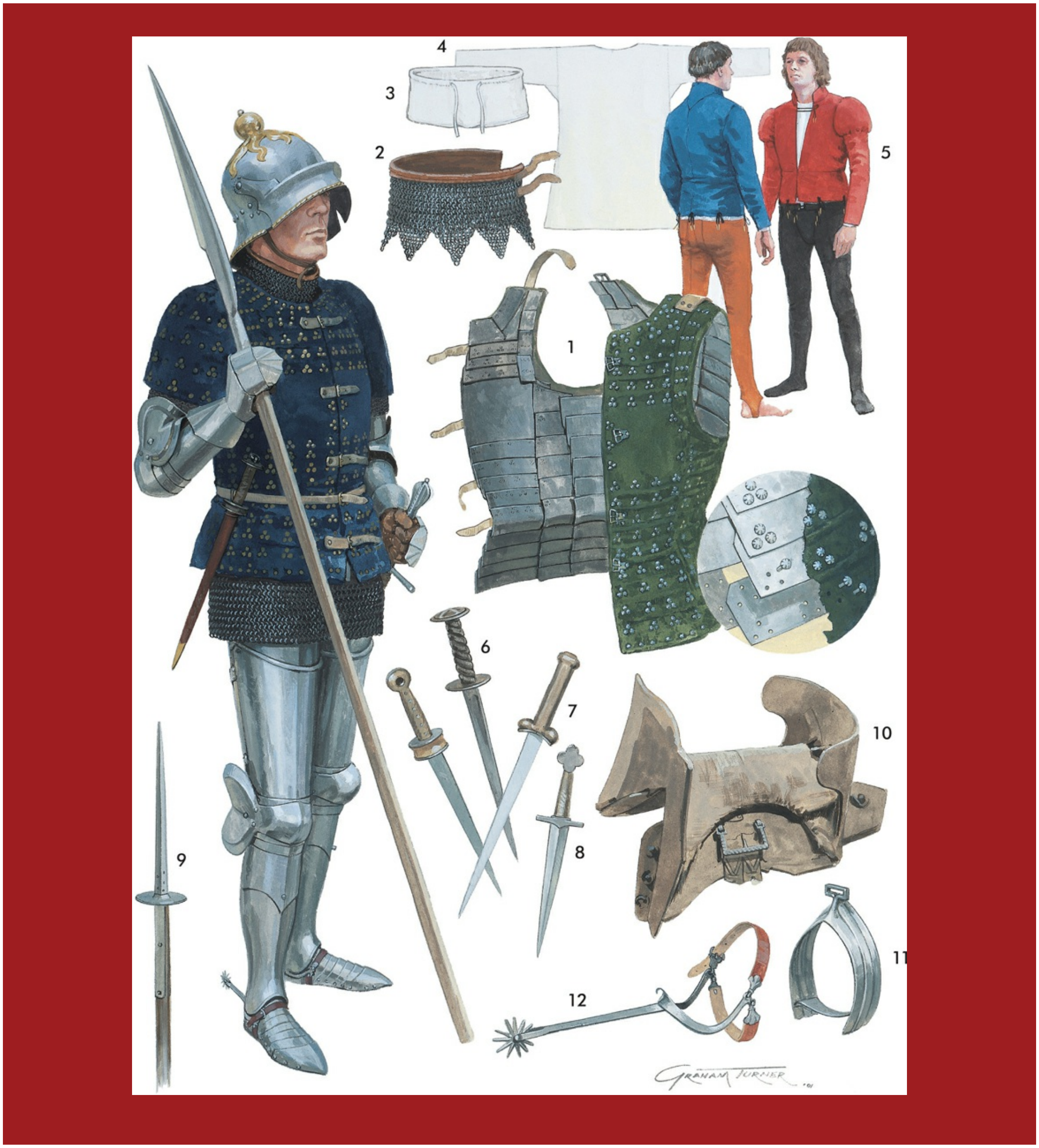
By about the third quarter of the century, a larger form covering the whole chest as far as the waist also appeared on German effigies. From about 1380 the breastplate, rounded in the chest and sometimes with a medial ridge, was usually worn without the coat of plates, but often with a fauld of plates that might curve down to cover the abdomen. They seem to have been strapped and perhaps laced in place over a cloth or leather jupon (a coat worn over the tunic and buttoned or laced down the front), and some may have been held by a saltire of straps across the back, as on a figure in Basle Cathedral. The back-defence was presumably of the coat of plates form until about 1400, for at about this date the effigy of John, Earl of Salisbury, displays hinges down the wearer's left side under a heraldic jupon, suggesting the fabric has a lining consisting of a large ridged breastplate with a (presumably) one-piece backplate. The hinges continue down the side, suggesting that the waist lames connected the breast and back to a shirt of hoops.

By mid-century, plate armour for the limbs had also become more popular. Greaves were also increasingly common by this time, and were sometimes worn with plate-armour foot protection called sabatons over the top and sides of the foot, leaving the sole of the shoe in contact with the ground. The strips were connected by internal leather straps and by pivoting rivets. They were probably strapped under the foot or pointed to the shoe, that is, a pair of points (twine or leather laces terminating in a metal aiglet) stitched to the top of the shoe, or threaded through holes in it, passed through a pair of holes in the sabaton and tied in a single bow. The upper end was probably attached to the front of the greave by points. Some sabatons appear to have been made from overlapping scales, either of iron, copper-alloy or leather, attached by a rivet at the top of each scale to a fabric or leather backing. Others may have been made from plates riveted under a cloth covering.

By about 1350, the all-enclosing poleyn protecting the knee was gradually superseded by a smaller form that had appeared some ten years earlier. This covered the front and outer side, the latter usually extended to form a circular, fan-shaped wing to deflect cuts, and occasionally another on the inside. Later wings were often oval in shape. The cuisse (thigh plate) was also changing in about 1340, to a form made from small plates riveted to a covering so the heads were visible, rather like the later brigandine worn on the body. The poleyn was secured to the lower part of the cuisse, and the cloth edge of the latter was often visible below it, cut in a fringe that overhung the armoured lower leg. From about 1370 a new form of cuisse appeared, made from a single plate shaped to the leg and protecting the front and outer side, though as early as around 1324, a figure on the canopy of Aymer de Valance's tomb in Westminster Abbey appears to have both plate cuisses and a fan-shaped side-wing on his poleyn. Later cuisses are shaped slightly over the top of the knee, and were attached to the poleyn by a pivoting rivet at each side. The cuisse of the boy prince in Chartres Cathedral suggests that the top edge was rolled out to stop weapon points snaking up past it; a stop-rib was sometimes added to the upper surface from about 1375. At about the same time, an additional outer plate was sometimes hinged to the cuisse. The cuisse was strapped round the leg and was probably also suspended like later examples by a leather tab riveted to the upper edge and pierced for points.

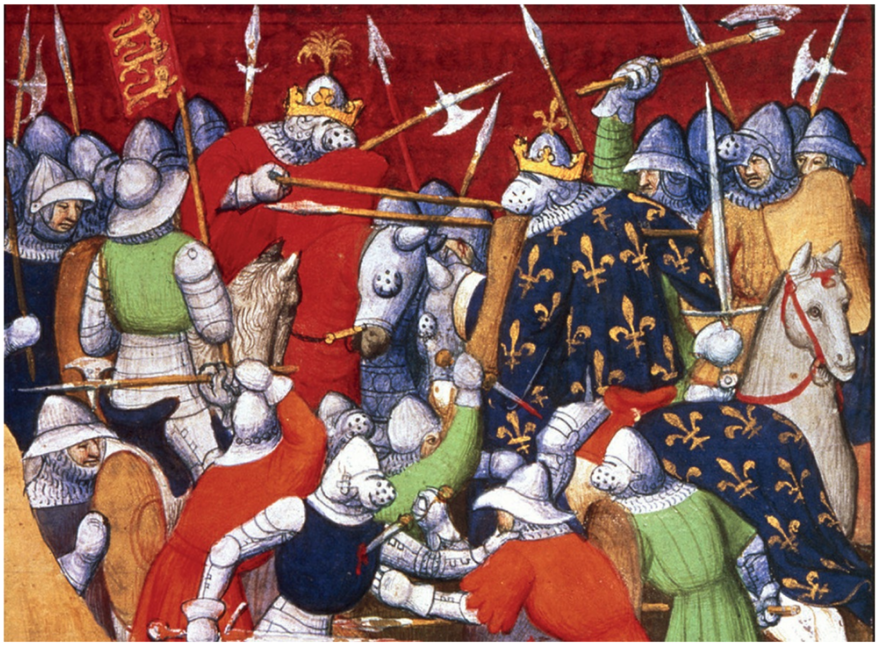
EQUIPMENT, 1450–1500

This knight wears a brigandine over mail skirt and sleeves, together with plate armour on the limbs. He carries a glaive. 1) The brigandine was made from a canvas jacket, which was lined with small plates secured by rivets through the front. 2) Upstanding mail collar, made from thicker rings for stiffness. 3) Linen drawers possibly with cod; some may have had a slit instead. 4) Doublet and hose, 1450. The hose had reached the hips and were pointed to the doublet. 5) Doublet and hose, late 15th century. 6) Rondel daggers. 7) Ballock dagger or knife, often worn with civilian dress. 8) Dagger. 9) Ahlespiess. 10) War saddles consisted of a wooden tree, the arçons sometimes reinforced by 'steels' screwed to the front and rear faces. 11) Stirrup of later 15th-century form. 12) Rowel spurs increased in length as the century went on, only shortening again suddenly in about 1500.



From the beginning of the 14th century, a small, circular, slightly shaped plate was occasionally attached to the point of the shoulder. This spaudler is sometimes seen without any other plate arm-defences. For the first quarter of the century, a small elbow cop or couter was occasionally riveted over the point of the elbow. However, though some references suggest that a form of arm-defence (perhaps of leather or even coat of plates construction) was worn occasionally, it is not until about 1320 that gutter-shaped plates, strapped over the outside of the arm with the couter, appear in artistic representations. A circular plate, the besagew, was sometimes attached in front to guard the armpit and a disc at the front of the elbow. Besagews at the armpit tend to disappear after about 1350, and only reappear in the 15th century.

By about 1335, tubular arm-defences were already known. The vambrace consisted of a gutter-shaped upper arm-defence (the 'upper cannon'), a cup-shaped couter at the elbow, and a two-part tube (the 'lower cannon') enclosing the forearm. It was simply slid up the arm in one piece, the top edge of the upper cannon being provided with a leather tab for a pair of points at the shoulder of the doublet. Occasionally forearm-defences of scale are shown. The cannon might be closed entirely and slid up the arm, or, as with an upper cannon from an effigy from Lesney Abbey, open slightly on the inner side and closed by straps and buckles. However, at this date the upper cannon was sometimes still of gutter-shaped design. The tubular lower cannon was usually worn under the loose three-quarter sleeve of the mail coat, from which it protruded. Cannons hinged on the outer side and buckled on the inner became more usual. Some couters were now of laminated construction. By 1360 a heart-shaped wing had replaced the disc-shaped wing of the couter, which itself now consisted of a single shaped plate with one or two lames to connect to the upper and lower cannon. In some late examples the rivet attaching the lame to the lower cannon may have run in a slot in the latter, forming a sliding rivet to allow the forearm to twist. Laminated spaudlers had appeared by 1335 and were soon being riveted permanently to the upper cannon of the vambrace.



Detail of a depiction of the battle of Poitiers (1356) illuminated in the early 15th century. The basinets are now fitted with rounded visors. Few shields are carried and these are convex. (British Library/CC0 1.0)

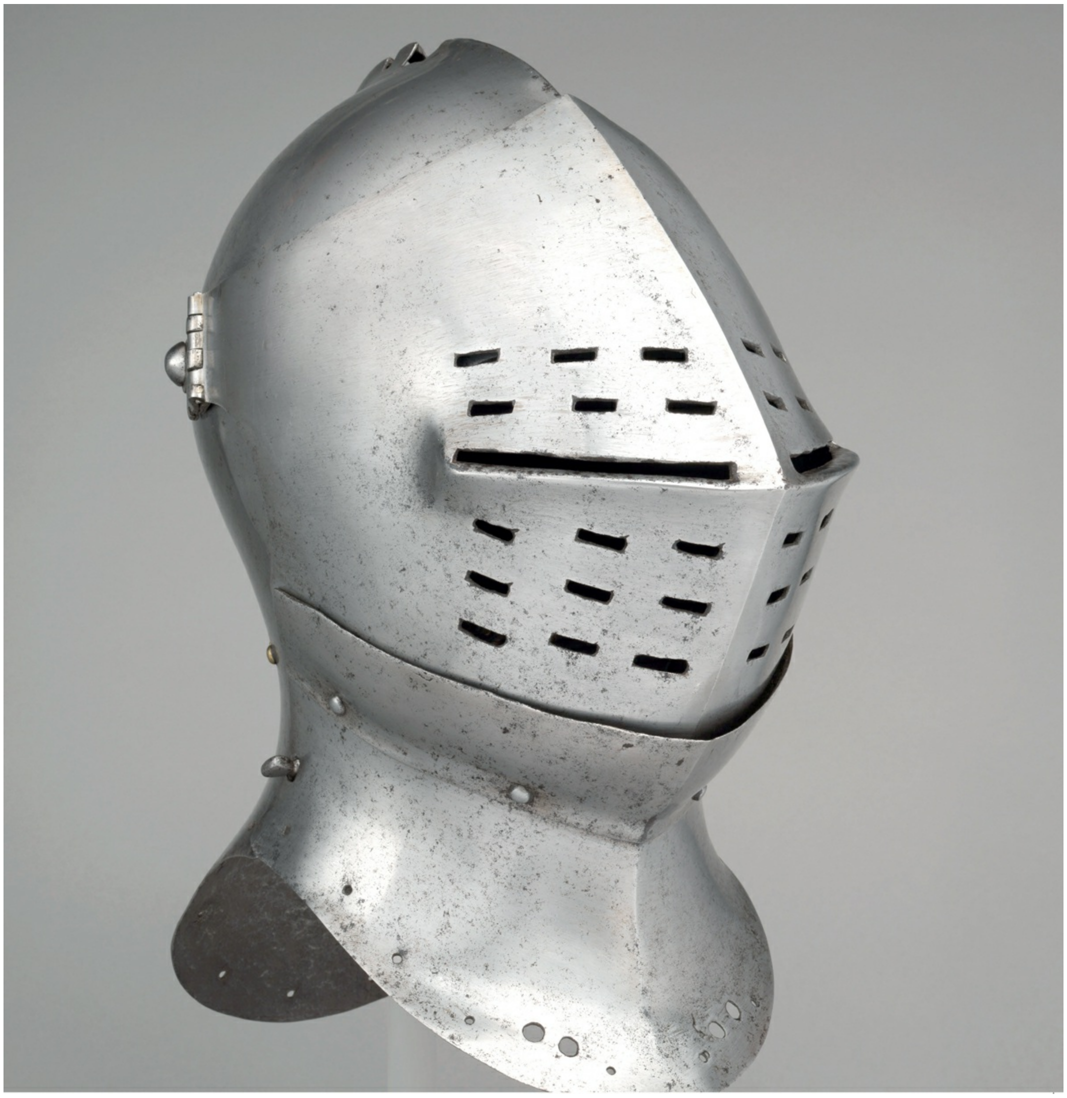
In the last years of the century a larger shoulder-defence, the pauldron, emerged, the plates of which extended over the chest and back.

Extensions of the mail sleeve into mittens remained popular as the century opened, and might still be found 50 years later. Mail gauntlets with flaring cuffs were rarely seen, but gauntlets of metal plates riveted over or between the layers of a fabric glove (presumably tinned or coppered to prevent rusting under the covering) were in use. They might have a large plate over the cuff or several strips. By 1350 the so-called 'hour-glass gauntlet' had appeared, and within about 20 years became the dominant form for the rest of the century. Many such gauntlets also had gadlings over the finger-joints and knuckles, low spikes for use as a kind of knuckleduster.

Early 14th-century basinets were small and globular, covered only the ears and often had a visor. Some were conical and did not cover the ears. Another conical version was much larger, reaching almost to the shoulders. By about 1330 the tall conical basinet had begun to extend down to cover the ears and neck, and within 20 years, together with the globular form (some examples of which were now pointed), it had extended further down to the base of the neck and the cheeks. The very deep basinet went out of use by about 1350. From

1375 the point of the skull of all basinets tended to be set further back.

In the 1320s, the riveted mail aventail began to be replaced by a detachable version secured over staples, and this would become almost universal after 1350. Some aventails were covered by a decorative cloth, while a few were tied down to the jupon at intervals by laces. A plate bevor (chin-defence) was occasionally fixed to the basinet from about 1330, and by the end of the century a few were extended to overlap the edges of the basinet and to cover the whole aventail. By 1400, large bevors riveted to the basinet formed the first great basinets. From about 1330 the basinet was often worn with a visor. This was at first often formed with a swelling over the face. The vision-slits were usually flanged to deflect a weapon point, and some seem to have been pointed at the bottom or extended horizontally to form a throat guard. After about 1380, the visor became drawn out in front, sometimes in a rounded form but more usually into a snout, and now had a flanged slit over the mouth. Each arm usually had a removable pin to allow the visor to be detached. The snouted form of helmet was dubbed a ‘pig-faced basinet’ in the 19th century and it is sometimes claimed that the term Hounskull, which appears to come from the contemporary German term *Hundsgugel* (‘hound’s hood’), was also used in England. One unusual hybrid is to be found on the brass of Sir Hugh Hastings (d.1347) in Elsing, Norfolk, where a figure wears what appears to be a basinet, but in this case fitted with a broad brim.



A late 15th-century basinet for foot combat in the tournament, from St Mary's Church, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. The additional slits allow air to the face but also provide some extra vision. (Metropolitan Museum, New York/Public Domain)

The basinet might be decorated by a plume of feathers, perhaps one or two pheasant feathers, set in a hole at the apex of the skull. Very rarely it might carry a crest. From about 1375, however, a number were decorated around the skull with an orle, a roll of cloth, or sometimes leather, which may be jewelled or embroidered. Others bore a simple circlet or crown. An ornamental pendant sometimes hung from the centre rear of the helmet.

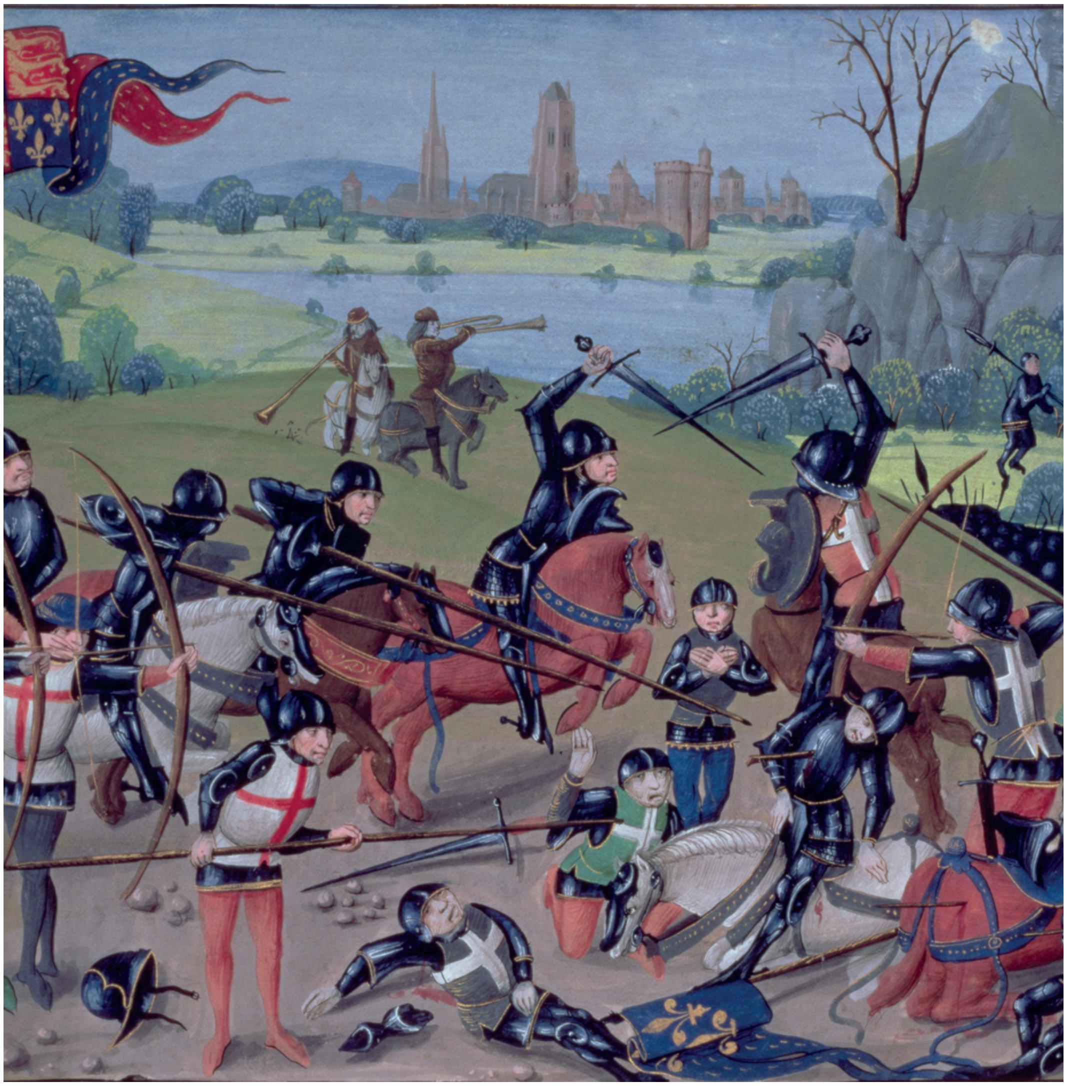
THE SHIELD

The shield was soon to lose its place on the battlefield. In the second half of the century a rectangular form of shield had appeared, usually concave, the upper and lower surfaces curving or bent outwards to the field. A cut-out was sometimes added to the top corner to accommodate the couched lance, mainly being used on horseback. The shield was increasingly relegated to the tournament, where safety made its use desirable.

THE 15TH CENTURY

As we have now seen, by the opening years of the 15th century steel plates covered the knight's entire body. By about 1425, knights increasingly replaced the coat of plates with armour which was attached by points (laces, often red) directly to an arming doublet, a padded coat provided with gussets of mail covering the armpit and inner arm. The Hastings manuscript of about 1485 ('How a man schall be armyd at his ese when he schal fighte on foote') said that points were to be of fine waxed twine such as that used to make crossbow strings, and each would be fitted over the end with a brass 'aiglet' or metal point. Some might be made from buckskin, which is tough and stretchy. A mail skirt additionally protected the groin. A few knights still wore the full mail coat underneath, with elbow-length sleeves over the plates of the upper arm, well into mid-century, a practice more common in Italy.

There were other changes during this century. From about 1430, the lower plate of the fauld was divided in two and hung from straps, becoming known as tassets, which gradually lengthened. The backplate had a culet (skirt) from which usually hung a single plate, the rump-guard. The whole was closed on the wearer's left side by hinges with pins and on his right side by straps and buckles, and by straps over the shoulders. The tassets would probably be already suspended. After about 1450 German cuirasses tended to use a waist belt instead of pins and buckles.



The battle of Agincourt, as imagined in the later 15th century. Note how the horses only wear shaffrons and, in one case, a crinet. The swords are acutely pointed. (Bridgeman Images)

By about 1430, the upper cannons of the vambrace almost enclosed the upper arm. West European vambraces often had separate couters in the German fashion, which necessitated points at the elbows also, for attaching them. In England the lower cannon probably attached to the lower end of the upper cannon by laces, though the exact method of this fixture is not known for certain. The shoulder was protected in the first half of the century by a laminated spaudler secured by points through holes at the top of one of the plates, and a strap and buckle under the arm. Often a pair of besagews – usually circular and sometimes drawn out at the centre to a short spike – guarded the armpits, being hung from the spaudler or laced on. By 1440 pauldrons, shoulder-defences that overlapped the chest and back, were common, being attached like spaudlers. On Italian armours at this time, asymmetrical reinforcing plates were attached to couter wings and pauldrons. Gauntlets had flared cuffs, and the knuckles might be furnished with gadlings. By about 1440 mitten gauntlets were replacing those with fingers. The sword was belted on the left side, and possibly a dagger on the right. The gauntlets might be buttoned over the sword hilt. If the knight was to ride, his spurs were buckled on.

HELMETS

In terms of helmets, in 1400 most knights wore the basinet with aventail. The visor could usually be detached by withdrawing a pin each side, a pointed form being common until about 1410. By about 1420 the great basinet was increasingly seen, with its attached plate neck-guard called a gorget. The front plate often pivoted for access, and had a chin-defence (bevor) pivoted inside or sometimes attached to it. A more rounded visor was now usual. The whole was usually strapped down to the breast- and backplates.

By the 1440s the sallet and occasionally the armet had begun to replace the basinet. The armet opened out at the sides to facilitate placing it over the head, the cheek-pieces being fastened together at the chin by a turning pin. The visor then closed over their upper edges. Further protection might be afforded by a wrapper, a frontal plate shaped like a ship's prow and with gorget plates below, which fitted the lower part of the helmet and was secured at the rear by a strap and buckle.

The far more popular sallet was sometimes accompanied by a bevor with gorget plates, strapped around the neck and laced through holes in the gorget plate to the breastplate, though rich examples might use a staple instead. The sallet was then secured with a leather chin strap. Most helmets had a leather or canvas lining-band riveted inside, to which was stitched a stuffed cloth lining. Otherwise a lining was glued inside. Other pieces of armour were often also lined. Occasionally a padded arming cap was still worn, tied under the chin.

WEARING PLATE ARMOUR

A knight's armour and equipment could be put on very quickly if necessary. Once the undergarments were in place, two attendants could arm a knight from head to toe (*cap-à-pied*) if necessary in about five to ten minutes, and remove the armour in less time still. A complete war harness weighed only about 45–55lb (25–35kg), the weight spread all over the body, and less than a modern infantryman carries in his backpack. A fit man could run, lie down or mount his horse with ease. There was no need for mechanical aids such as cranes, a later myth which has clung on tenaciously, largely thanks to misguided films. It was easy enough to move in full armour; some could (and still do) turn cartwheels, or vault into the saddle. The greatest drawback was the lack of ventilation. The body's heat could not escape easily and the wearer soon got hot, especially when the helmet was in place. Some died in the press of battle from suffocation, as did Henry V's cousin, the Duke of York, pulled from the crush of bodies at Agincourt (in October 1415) without a scratch. In summer sunshine the metal became hot to touch; in winter it was cold to the touch but hot inside.

The metals used to make armour ranged from iron to impure mild steel containing slag, which could not be removed by the processes available. However, it could turn a sword and was designed to make a weapon point skid off. A v-shaped stop-rib below the neck was welded on to guide a point to right or left of the throat and so away. Ribs were also added at certain other points, such as the pauldron.

Wealthy men might purchase harness from the top armourers of northern Italy or south Germany (Augsburg, Nuremberg or Landshut). A knight of average means might buy a workaday Milanese armour, brought back by merchant ships on return journeys. Sir John Cressy bought such a harness in 1441, costing £8 6s 8d, while armour for a squire cost from £5 to £6 16s 8d. Wills and inventories show that armours from Lombardy were popular. Pictorial evidence suggests that much English armour was of the style worn in England, France and the Low Countries. Some of this may have been Italian export armour, designed in the style of the area where the armourers wished to make a sale. However, much was probably often purchased from merchant armourers, who offered the relevant parts to make up an armour, which they were sufficiently skilled to adjust to fit the individual purchaser. Armour that does not fit properly is very uncomfortable, especially over the ankle bones. In 1473 Sir John Paston, then with the Calais garrison, negotiated with an armourer in Bruges for a harness, and in January 1475 mentions riding into Flanders to get horses and armour.

HORSE FURNITURE

Horses were sometimes covered in a trapper or caparison, a cloth housing coming down to the hocks and sometimes covering the tail. These were often divided into two parts at the saddle, but illustrations occasionally show trappers that appear to be made in one piece. They were usually extended to form a head covering, sometimes with shaped ear coverings. In some instances the whole trapper was probably quilted. It was increasingly used to display the arms of the rider, although many were plain.

By the end of the 13th century illustrations often show the shield and trapper carrying the coat-of-arms, while the surcoat is plain. Trappers appear to have had linings, perhaps as separate items to absorb the horse's sweat, though illustrations suggest they were integral. By mid-century some illustrations show trappers made from mail, which must have been supported by a quilted trapper beneath or else a linen lining, as probably described in the inventory of Fawkes de Bréauté of 1224, where mail and linen are mentioned together. In 1277, 16 shillings was paid for two linen coverings to go under the mail. Such trappers covered the whole horse except the ears. Squires in Edward I's army were expected to ride 'covered' horses, and if they did not, their wages fell to 6d or 8d. Since their animals were rounceys worth about £5–£8, rather than powerful warhorses, does 'covered' refer to cloth or quilted trappers, or even perhaps those made from cuir bouilli?

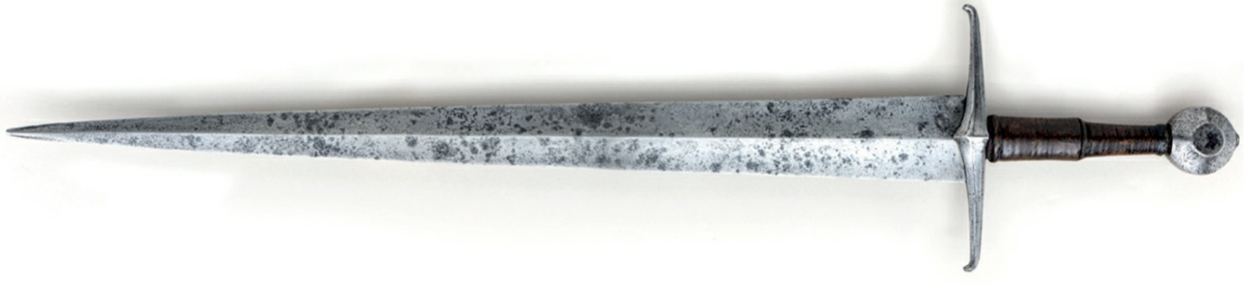
The seal of Robert FitzWalter (shown here) shows the neck and head of a horse covered with trellis patterning, as though this area is quilted. Separate versions of these hoods, probably those referred to as testiers, are sometimes seen towards the end of the century. Shaffrons (plate defences for the horse's head) are not illustrated, although leather forms are mentioned in the Windsor Tournament Roll of 1278, and they appear on some Continental illustrations. The shaffron could be of metal or cuir bouilli, and was probably used as a point of attachment for the fan or moulded crests sometimes shown on top of horses' heads. By the late 14th century shaffrons that enclosed almost the whole head might be worn, perhaps with a poll plate or short laminated crinet (neck-defence). By this date a mail crinet was sometimes worn with a plate shaffron, together with perhaps a mail curtain around the chest and rump. A plate chest-defence, the peytral, was occasionally used by the 1330s, sometimes worn over the caparison. By the mid-15th century, richer knights might also add a plate crupper and occasionally even flanchards (flank-defences).

WEAPONS

THE SWORD

The prized weapon of the knight was always the sword. In the early years of the 13th century, the sword was essentially a cutting weapon, divided into five major types. Some blades had straight, razor-sharp edges running almost parallel to a sharp point, with a fuller (or channel) down the centre of each side of the blade, to lighten and strengthen it. Another form was more tapered, the fuller running perhaps three-quarters of the way down; this would become the commonest form of sword until the third quarter of the 13th century, and some were large specimens.

In about 1240 a new type of sword appeared, broad-bladed, often widening slightly towards the grip, which was often about 6in. (16.25cm) long, though narrower blades and shorter grips were also seen in the second half of the century. The fuller usually reached about halfway down the blade. Larger versions of this form had blades from about 37 to 40in. (94–104.6cm) in length, the grip rising to perhaps 9in. (23cm). These, like the larger swords mentioned previously, were great swords or swords of war, also later known as bastard or hand-and-a-half swords. It may be that the gradual increase in solid body armour and limb-defences was the reason for the development of a short, wide-bladed slashing sword that nevertheless tapered to a sharp point. The fuller on these ran about halfway, and it always seems to be provided with some form of wheel pommel at the end of a usually short grip. In about 1280 a strongly tapered acutely pointed sword of flattened diamond section made its appearance.



An arming sword of around 1375–1450. The blade is of diamond section to give it stiffness for a thrust, while the sharp taper allows it to force mail links apart. The disc pommel helped to counterbalance the blade so the point of balance was as close to the hand as possible. (Metropolitan Museum, New York/Public Domain)

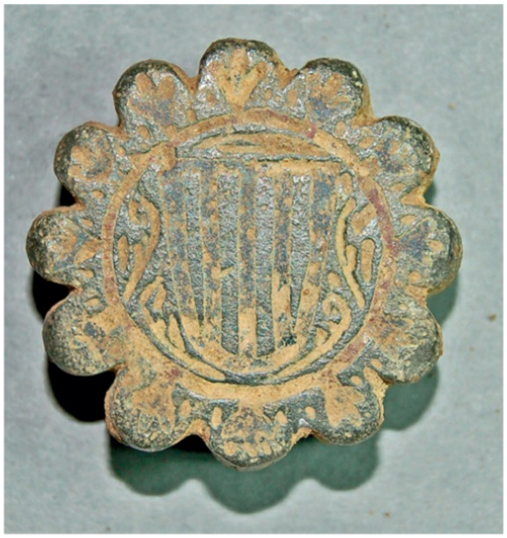
An unusual form of sword that appeared in the 13th century was the falchion, in shape not unlike a butcher's cleaver. Instead of being designed to balance as close to the hand as possible, it had a short blade that was wider and heavier towards the point, to produce a powerful cutting weapon.

A narrower-bladed thrusting sword with long grip (between 7 and 10in., 17.75 and 25.5cm) appeared at some time around the middle of the 14th century. Some of these were made with a short section of the blade in front of the guard left blunt (later called the ricasso), enabling the user to hook his finger over it and hold the sword further forward, the better to deliver a thrust.

Dual-purpose weapons for cutting and thrusting were made from the beginning of the 14th century, with a tapered blade which was fullered for just over half its length, but with the lower part of the blade made in flattened diamond section. Another type of weapon has a long tapered blade, fullered for about one-third of the length, with a long grip. One group dating from about 1355 to 1425 has a long tapering blade usually of hexagonal section, and a long grip. The pommel is a flattened oval or else a late 14th-century 'scent-stopper' variety.

At the beginning of the 15th century, some swords tapered to an acute point, with a blade of flattened diamond-section for stiffness; others had a broader blade that tapered more acutely nearer the point but with edges sharp enough to cut. During the second quarter of the century, a form of blade appeared that was flat in section but which had an upstanding mid-rib. A few broad-bladed weapons had two short fullers near the cross-guard, with a short single one below, and were probably Italian imports. Some swords were heavy, perhaps 5lb

(2.2kg) or more, and some over 50in. (1.2m) long, designed as thrusting weapons to combat plate armour. Long, narrow blades tended to have a long grip, to help balance them, and an elongated pommel like a ‘scent-bottle’.



A cast copper alloy medieval sword pommel, probably dating to the 13th century. It is 1/⅓in. (34mm) in diameter with a thickness of ⅓in. (9.5mm). Circular in plan, it has 12 lobes that run around the outside. (The Portable Antiquities Scheme/The Trustees of the British Museum/CC BY-SA 2.0)

The cross-guard was often fairly simple, sometimes curving slightly towards the blade. Some swords had a small flap of leather folded over the cross-guard and down over the blade. Called the chappe (literally ‘cape’), this flap overlapped the mouth of the scabbard when the weapon was sheathed, and helped prevent water running down inside and rusting the sword.

The sword hilt was covered by a grip of wood, bone or horn. On swords with a flat form of tang, the grip consisted of two pieces cut out to accommodate the tang, then glued together over it. As thinner tangs became popular in the second half of the 14th century, a one-piece grip was bored longitudinally before the heated tang was forced up through the hole, widening it as it burned through it. The core was usually covered additionally by winding cord or wire round it, but might also be bound in diaper fashion by cord or leather strips, all designed to prevent the weapon slipping in a sweating hand.

Pommel forms varied. The plain or chamfered variety of disc pommels were perhaps the commonest forms, though a wheel type with a pronounced form of centre was known but not particularly common until the second half of the 13th century. A rare type, shaped like a petalled flower, was in use from about 1280. A version of the old ‘cocked hat’ Viking pommel was in use mainly in the middle 50 years of the century, and a diamond version was also seen until about 1275. Another throwback had indented top edges and is found largely on northern English and southern Scottish monuments dating from about 1250 to 1350. Rarely, spherical pommels were seen, or perhaps a low boat-shaped type. One form of pommel seen up to about 1325 has the form of a petalled flower. A spherical pommel survives on a sword of about 1300 from London, and a bevelled cube on an effigy at Halton Holgate (Lincolnshire). A ‘tear-drop’ style flourished until about mid-century. A type rarely seen before about 1360 was the ‘scent-stopper’ pommel. Some examples were faceted.

DAGGERS

Daggers were sometimes worn, though seldom are the sheaths shown in 13th-century art, even when knights are holding the weapon. The blades tapered to a point, but otherwise the hilt tended to resemble that of a small sword; the short cross-guard seems in some cases to have curled in tightly towards the blade. Surviving leather knife sheaths are often embossed with designs. The dagger carried from the last quarter of the 14th century was often a form of *rondel* dagger, with a disc or rondel at the base of the grip, but a pommel instead of the more usual second rondel at this end. These daggers were usually of triangular section, single edged and tapering to a point, being sturdy but very sharp weapons. Quillon daggers (with cross-guards styled after those of a sword) were also worn, or occasionally ballock daggers (with two swellings at the base of the hilt), although they were more usual with civilian dress. Like scabbard leather, sheaths were often highly decorated with punched or engraved designs, and civilian daggers might be fastened behind the pouch, slung from the belt, or hung from a cord on the belt.

Scabbards were made from wooden boards, covered in leather and fitted with an iron or copper-alloy chape at the tip. Some had a metal locket at the mouth. The sword belt became an ingenious arrangement of cut and interlaced straps designed to hold the sword at a convenient angle for drawing and to prevent the owner tripping over it. At the beginning of the 13th century, belts were forked at one end and tied by passing these through two slots cut in the side attached to the scabbard, before knotting them together. By mid-century a strap and buckle arrangement had become usual, the strap ending in a metal finial. Belts were often decorated, perhaps with gilt eyelets and bars.

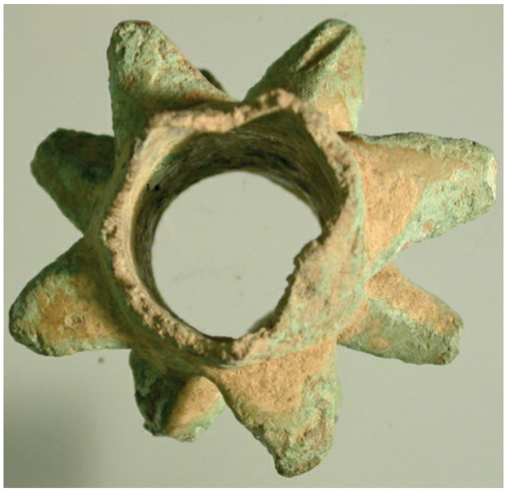
Sword belts would change dramatically in design during the 14th century, from a two-point attachment of leather, or increasingly, metal mounts, to the hip belt that appeared in about 1340 and would become standard for the rest of the century. Usually decorated with gold, gilt or silvered plaques often set with jewels or enamel, the belt was normally clasped or sometimes buckled at the front. In some instances the sword was still hung from a diagonal strap, while the horizontal hip belt was used only for the dagger on the other side.

Scabbards in the 15th century were of wood covered in leather as before, often dyed and sometimes decorated with metal mounts down their length.

Locket and chape might be gilded, pierced or set with precious stones. Slits near the top of the scabbard were sometimes made to accommodate a small eating knife and steel for sharpening or a bodkin. Jewelled sword belts, often of metal plaques, were worn on the hip (sometimes secured to the armour) until mid-century, but by 1415 diagonal belts had become popular. In mid-century the rear of such belts was forked, the lower part being attached to the scabbard about 12 in. (30cm) from the mouth, moving it back from the wearer's feet and putting the hilt at a better angle. Occasionally a metal or leather loop was riveted to the fauld to support the scabbard instead of a belt; a dagger might be similarly worn on the right side.

THE LANCE

The lance was carried on horseback, with a shaft of Cypress wood according to Chaucer, although ash was just as likely. At first it was a simple staff tipped with a steel head, but in the early years of the 14th century a steel disc, the vamplate, was sometimes nailed on in front of the hand. By the end of the 14th century, the hand grip was usually waisted somewhat and the vamplate more conical in shape. A leather strip was often nailed around the shaft behind the hand. This, a simple form of graper, was designed to ram against the armpit to prevent the lance sliding back on impact. Also by the end of the 14th century, early lance-rests had probably appeared, riveted to the solid breast-defence to take the impact. The lance might be used to carry a small pennon, nailed on the shaft behind the head, on which were painted or embroidered the arms of the owner. When fighting on foot the lance was sometimes cut down to a more manageable 5ft (1.5m) in length, but it was not as effective as the long-handled axe. Already for jousts of peace in the tournament some blunted lance-heads were in use in the 13th century, and some form of coronel, a head formed of three or more points to spread the force of a blow, may have been used.



A copper-alloy moulded mace-head, probably of later 12th- or early 13th-century date. (The Portable Antiquities Scheme/The Trustees of the British Museum/CC BY-SA 2.0)

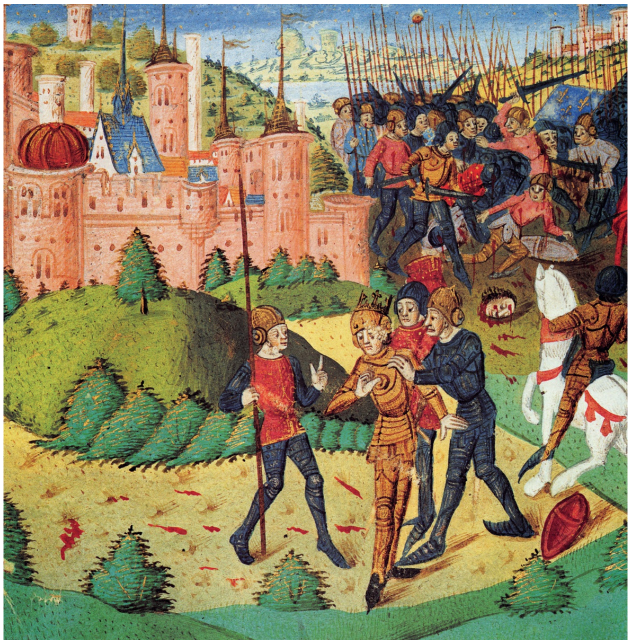
HAFT WEAPONS

Maces and hammers were also becoming more popular as plate armour increased. The mace's haft was made of wood, and in the early years the head tended to be a moulded copper-alloy knob covered in projections. By the mid-13th century flanged forms were also in use, usually with parallel sides, and by the 14th century the head was usually of flanged steel or iron. A wrist strap might be bound round the haft. Short or long hammers were usually furnished with a rear spike and sometimes the corners of the hammer face were slightly elongated. By the end of the 14th century the pollaxe was also coming into use, a staff weapon with an axe blade and top spike, backed by a hammer or spike, or else having a hammer with top and rear spike.

The military flail for horsemen, a spiked ball chained to a haft, appeared by the end of the 13th century, but was not common. The halberd, meanwhile, had a long blade backed by a fluke, with langets and top spike. The less common ahlespiess had a four-sided spike with a disc at the base. Halberds, bills, glaives and guisarmes were more common in the hands of ordinary footsoldiers.

Other weapons were sometimes carried. A long-handled axe with a trumpet-shaped head could be used on foot and, surprisingly, is also sometimes seen being wielded by horsemen, occasionally fitted with a rear spike. A more convenient form for the rider was a short horseman's axe with a rear spike, in form rather like a tomahawk or modern fireman's axe.

THE CHIVALRIC KNIGHT

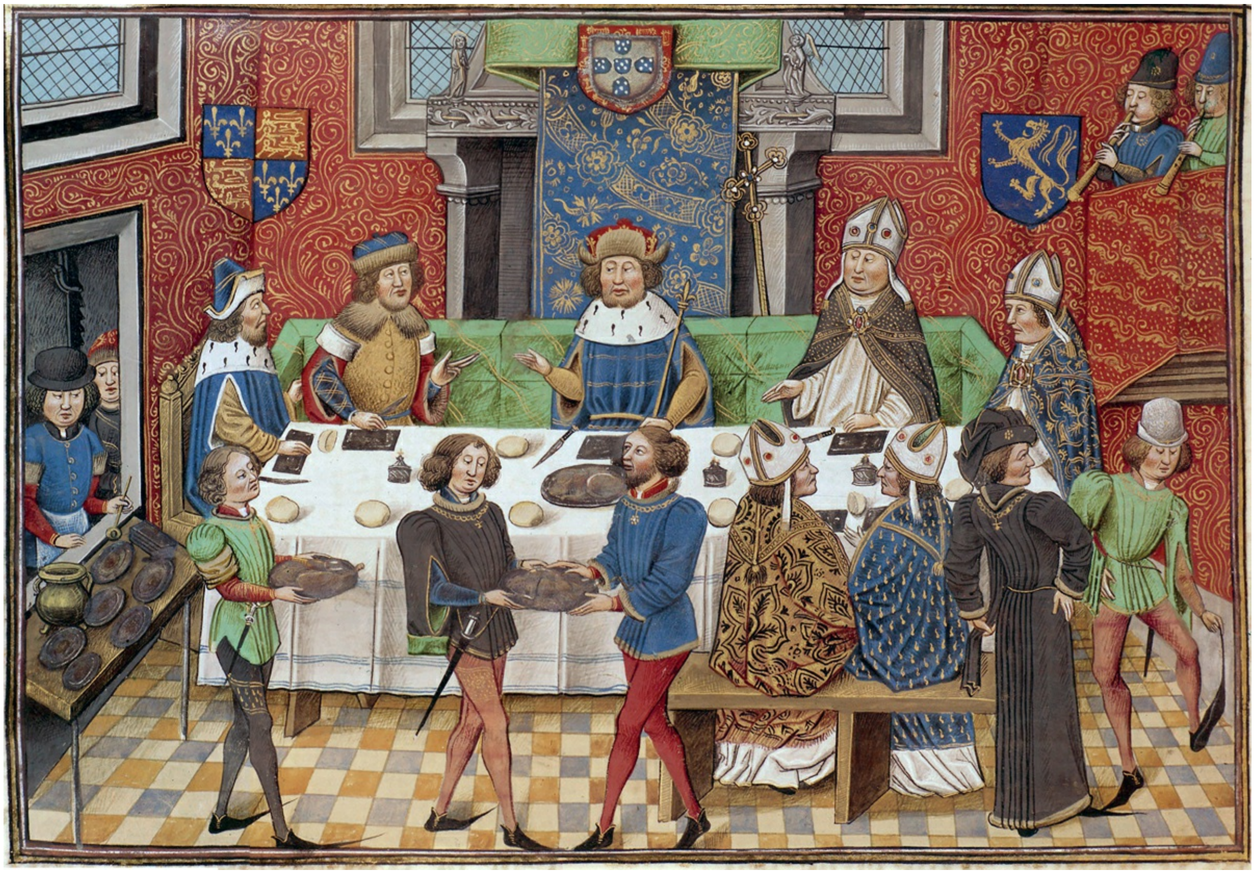


This later 15th-century illustration shows John II of France (marked out in gilded armour) captured by English soldiers during the battle of Poitiers in 1356. Allowed to leave England while his ransom was raised, his son Louis was left as surety in English-held Calais but escaped. John was so imbued with chivalry that he shocked his people by voluntarily returning to England. (API/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images)

The horse was originally central to the chivalry that bound knights together. By the 13th century, the connection with riding had expanded to include a whole range of other ideas. The church had done its best to harness the violence of the warrior class, by imposing the Peace and then the Truce of God from the 11th century, but this had only met with marginal success. Nevertheless, it steered knights into crusades for the glory of God and invoked their protection for the weak and for women. The cult of the Virgin had grown in France during the 12th century, as had the love poetry of the southern French troubadours, which then moved north to find a less heady form among the *trouvères* of northern France. Also in the 12th century tales of King Arthur grew more widely known, supported by the English kings who, as foreigners themselves, were keen to associate with a native English hero. These romances were a blend of adventure, love, monsters and magic. The sub-Roman Arthur became a medieval knight, his court echoed in the social gatherings called Round Tables held by English kings. The romances showed how knights should behave – as brave and bold adventurers, seeking the Holy Grail that only the purest would attain.

ROMANCE AND RELIGION

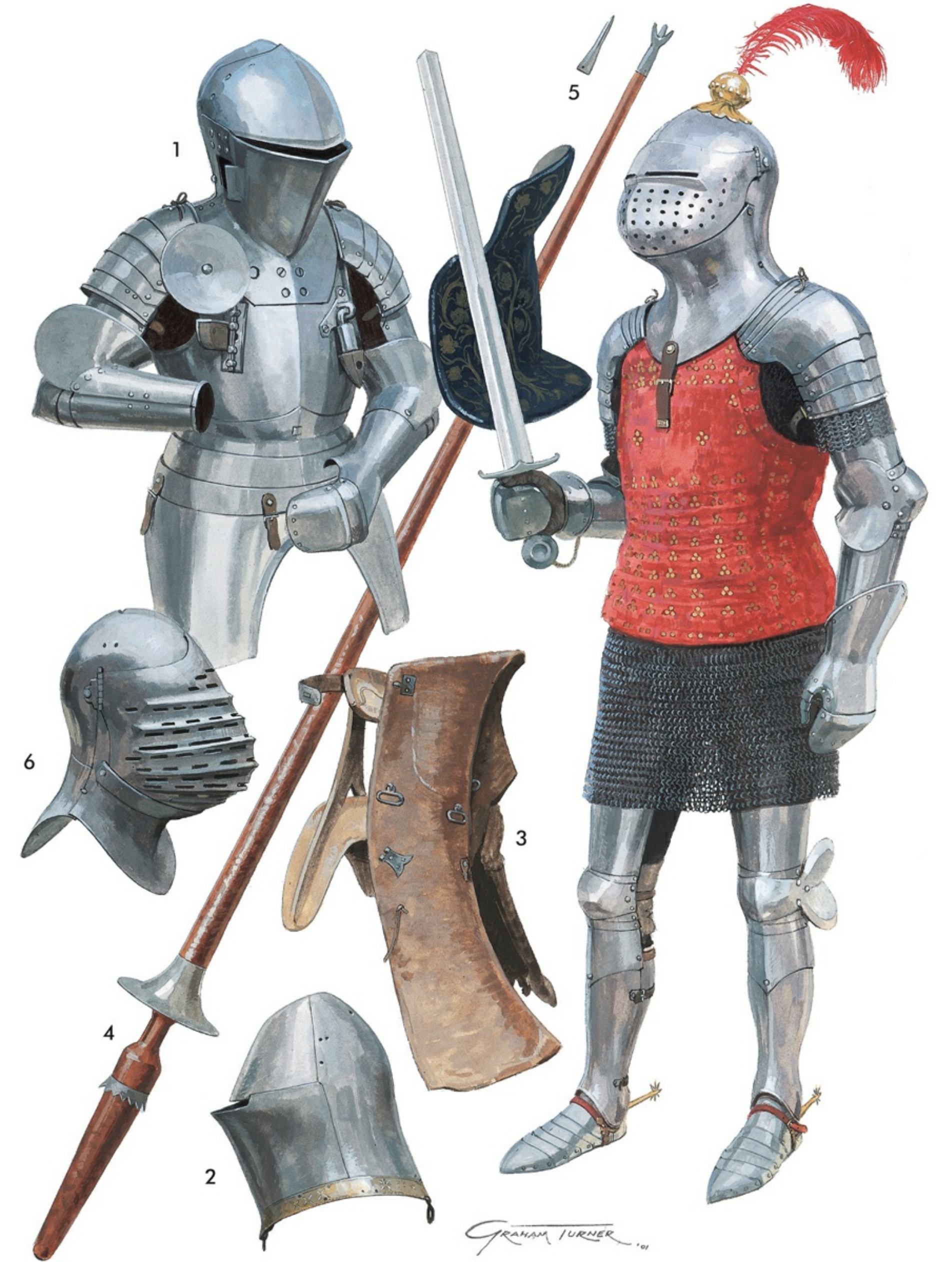
Reality, of course, was often far different. Marriages were usually hard bargains, a matter of lands, dowries and marriage portions, and girls were often betrothed when only ten years old or less. Not a few knights were quite happy to let someone else do the fighting. But chivalry bound this stratum of society together, and the exclusivity attached to it seems to have increased during the 13th century, perhaps reflected in the appearance of knightly effigies. The social divisions in England after the Norman Conquest had been diluted by intermarriage, enough for Orderic Vitalis in the 12th century to remark that it was difficult to tell apart freemen of the different races.



This scene of John of Gaunt feasted by the King of Portugal gives a good idea of a rich man's life in the late 15th century. Food is placed on a table while musicians play. From Jean de Wavrin's *Chroniques d'Angleterre,* made in the 1470s for Edward IV. (Photo 12/Universal Images Group/Getty Images)

TOURNAMENT ARMOUR

The first reference to specialized armours for the popular jousts of peace with blunted lances comes in the reign of Edward IV. Prior to this, combatants basically wore field armour with a frog-mouthed helm and some reinforces. A 1446 French description of specialized armour for such courses, compared with later Flemish armours, allows a reconstruction of a later 15th-century harness. 1) A frog-mouthed helm. 2) The helm for jousts of peace, associated with Henry V. 3) High saddle for jousts of peace. 4) Lance with coronel head for jousts of peace. 5) Sharp head for jousts of war. Such jousts were usually run in field armour, often with armet and wrapper. 6) Great basinet from Wimborne Minster in Dorset, 1490–1500.



Despite the sons of knights increasingly having to learn French as a second language, the court language would remain French until at least the 14th century, and the more cultured could read Latin, though most were still illiterate, and proud of it. They ate few green vegetables (considered food for peasants) but large amounts of meat, with fish on Fridays. Men of standing validated documents with their personal seals, usually depicting them in armour on their warhorses.

The poetry and romances often depict the heroes as men of matchless courage, slaying left and right. It has been pointed out, however, that knights in real war reacted to combat as most men will in any age. They felt braver than others might do because they were well armoured (though this was by no means proof against all weapons). They advanced in close formation partly because there was safety in numbers and it was reassuring to be pressed up close with comrades. The ideals of honour and steadfastness under the eyes of friends kept men at their station, but such bravery might evaporate and knights slip away or be involved in the infectious panic that turned into flight.

England was a Catholic country until the Tudor era and, where possible, knights heard Mass daily.

All castles were equipped with a chapel of some description, from small workmanlike structures to beautifully decorated affairs. The church always tried to take its part in everyday life, and it was useful for fighting men to have God's ear; those in peril of death were often keen to make confession before risking their life. In the field a sword's cross-guard made a suitable crucifix, especially if the sword had been blessed on the altar.

All the same it is hard to accept that some of the more brutal mercenaries had much care for Christian beliefs. The Flemish mercenaries of King John were hated for their cold callousness. The Scots who raided into Cumbria and Northumberland after Wallace's victory at Stirling Bridge killed men, women and children, causing an outcry that suggests this was not considered normal practice in England. The *Chronicon de Lanercost* relates that Hugh de Cressingham, killed at Stirling Bridge, had his skin stripped off to make a sword belt for Wallace.

The construction of Raglan Castle in Gwent was begun by Sir William ap Thomas in about 1430 and carried on by his son, Sir William Herbert, later Earl of Pembroke, until he was executed in 1469. (Nick Sarebi/CC BY 2.0)

INHERITANCE AND TAX

The rule of primogeniture meant that a man's inheritance usually passed to his eldest son, thus leaving large numbers of landless younger sons, some of whom went into the church. Many, however, went off to seek their fortune, hoping for employment in the retinues of other lords. When an eldest son came into his inheritance he had to pay his lord a relief, a sort of death duty or fine for permission to receive his father's lands. Magna Carta in 1215 laid down that this should be £100 for a barony and 100 shillings for a knight's fee. If a lord had no son, his inheritance was split between his daughters. If they were not heiresses, a lord's daughters were sometimes married off to his knights, but the latter, when marriage was the easiest way to advancement and wealth, might well need an incentive such as a cash payment, land or a reduction in their knight service. Under-age heirs who became orphans were made the wards of their lord or king, who usually milked their estates for every financial gain possible.

There were certain occasions when a lord could demand an 'aid' from his free tenants to meet some very heavy expenditure. Magna Carta limited this burden to ransoming the lord himself, knighting his eldest son or marrying his eldest daughter for the first time. Not until the Statute of Westminster in 1275 was a financial limit set on how much could be demanded in an aid, at 20 shillings for each knight's fee or £20 worth of land held at a rent.

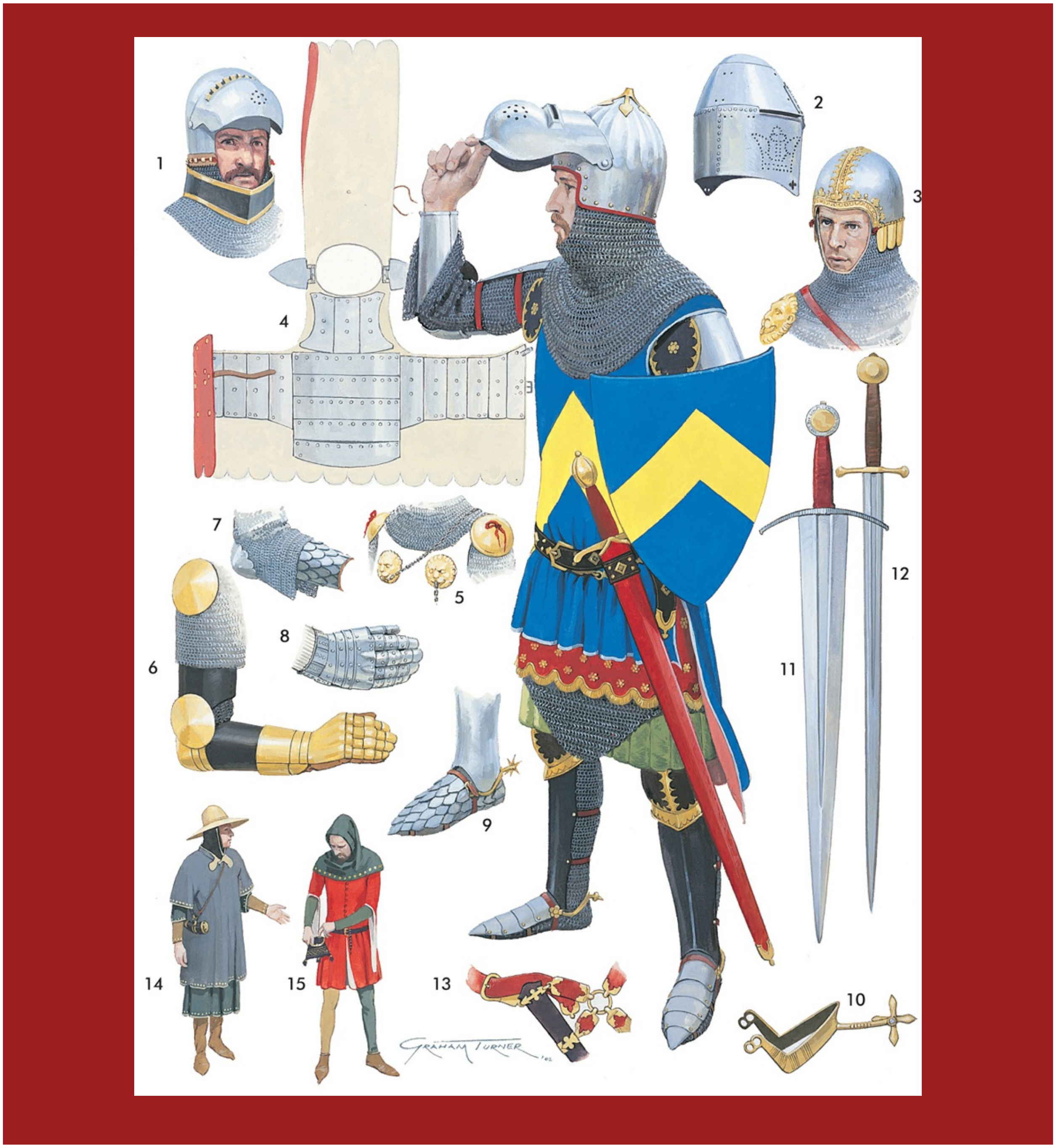
DISTRAINT OF KNIGHTHOOD

Civil duties for knights increased during the thirteenth century. In the courts of the lord's honour they received experience of law and business. In shire and hundred courts they had the opportunity to become involved with local government. They also oversaw the venison in royal forests and forest pasture-rights. Knights of the shire were expected to sit in judgement, at least in the juries of Grand Assize (for land settlements, including on-site inspections), and often in others. Suspected felons might be placed under the custody of a group of knights until called to trial. There always seem to have been enough knights to fulfil these duties, even when after the revolt against John and the accession of Henry III, rebels returned to their allegiances. Common writs were produced to allow such men, for a price, to buy back lands they had previously held. All this required juries of knights, and the pressure of work grew appreciably. Men eligible for knighthood began to avoid it.

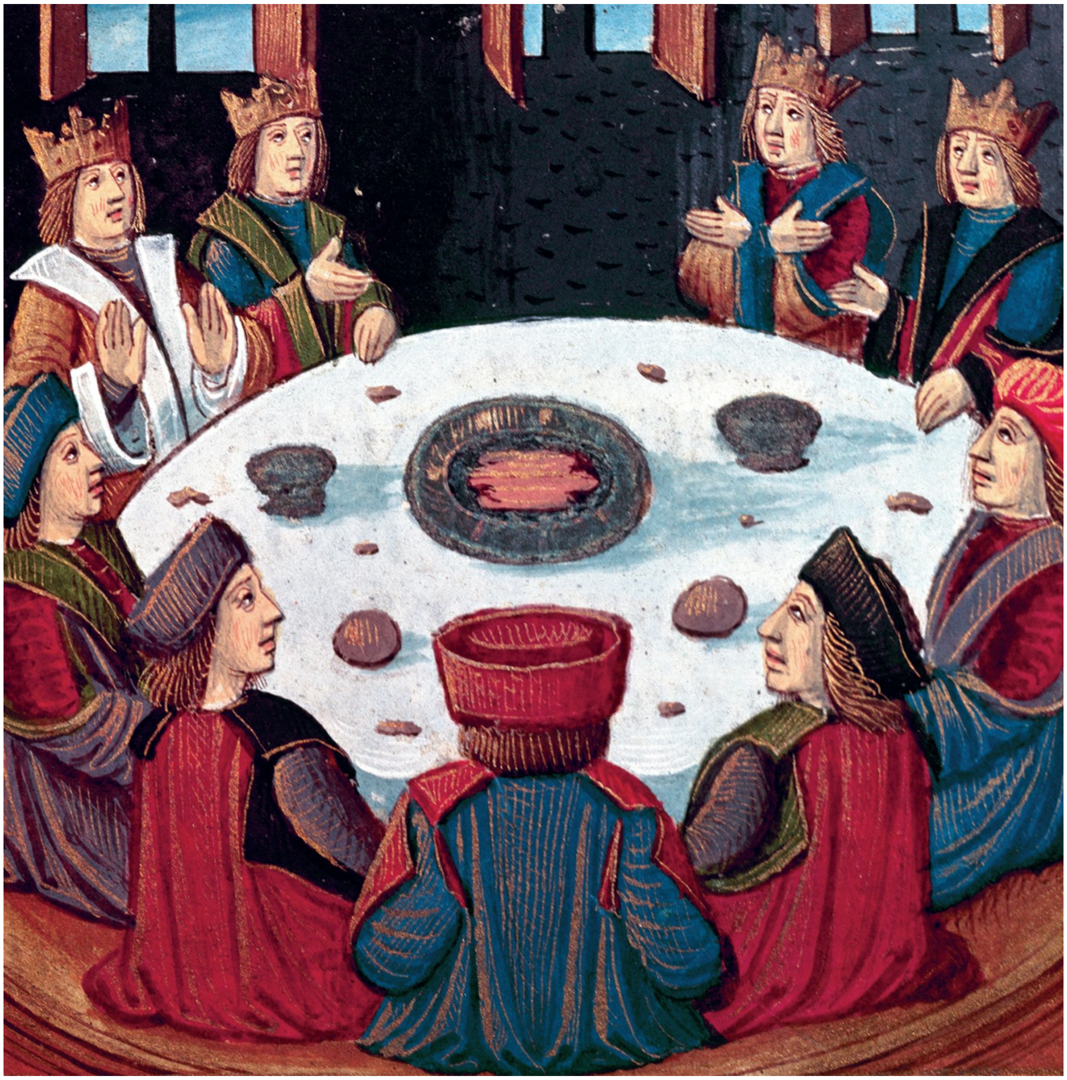
What worried the king, however, was not the loss of jury members, but the loss of men in armour. In 1224 everyone in possession of a knight's fee was ordered to become a knight by Easter of the following year. This process was distraint of knighthood, an attempt to increase the number of knights by force. In 1234 the king ordered that all those holding one or more knights' fees directly (in chief) from the king should get some armour and be knighted, but he rather undermined this by granting exemptions to certain people in return for cash. In 1241 another order was sent out, this time to anyone holding land worth £20 per year. Further demands were made in the 1250s, including one in 1254 in which the king's son figured. In 1282 all those with £30 of land were instructed to equip themselves with a horse and armour (though they did not actually have to be knights), and in 1285 all freeholders worth more than £100 per year were required to be knighted. This qualification fell in 1292 to all those with £40. From 1294 wealth alone became the qualification for service, not knighthood.

KNIGHT AND EQUIPMENT, *c.*1350

By the mid-14th century the surcoat tended to shorten, especially at the front, as seen on this figure based on the brass of Sir John d'Aubenon. He wears layered armour: a quilted aketon, then a mail haubergeon, then a coat of plates with floriated rivet heads. 1) Visored basinet and plate collar. 2) The helm of the Black Prince, *c.*1376. 3) Decorated basinet fitted with pendant flaps. 4) Inside view of a poncho-style coat of plates. 5) Evidence for a solid breast-defence seen in the guard-chains running through decorated lion-heads. 6) Arm-defence. 7) Lower arm-defence of scale. 8) Gauntlet with plates riveted to a glove. 9) Sabaton of scale, together with enclosed greave. 10) Gilt copper-alloy rowel spur. 11) Sword with relatively short blade reinforced by a flattened diamond point, *c.*1350. 12) Sword, first half of the 14th century. 13) Sword belt fittings, from effigy of Maurice, Lord Berkeley (died 1326). 14) Garnache with tongue-shaped lapels, worn over supertunic, and wide-brimmed hat. 15) Cote-hardie worn over jupon, and hood.



Whether or not there was a so-called ‘crisis of the gentry’ in the 13th century is heavily debated by historians; certainly a number of men of knightly rank found life hard, and distraint a nuisance, when there were plenty of mounted troops available who were not technically knights. Pay had now risen from 8d a day for a knight to 2 shillings, and 4 shillings for a banneret, but thereafter stayed the same until the 15th century. The monarch also tried to attract new knights by making the ceremony of knighthood more special and by knighting groups of candidates together. Edward I also used Round Tables and tournaments as a lure to knighthood, harking back to Arthurian and other romances as a stimulant. Nevertheless, in the 14th and 15th centuries some squires were knighted much later in life, or remained squires until they died.



This illustration, from the late 15th century, depicts King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, the myth being a key literary vehicle for the expression of chivalry. (Universal Images Group/Hulton Fine Art/Getty)

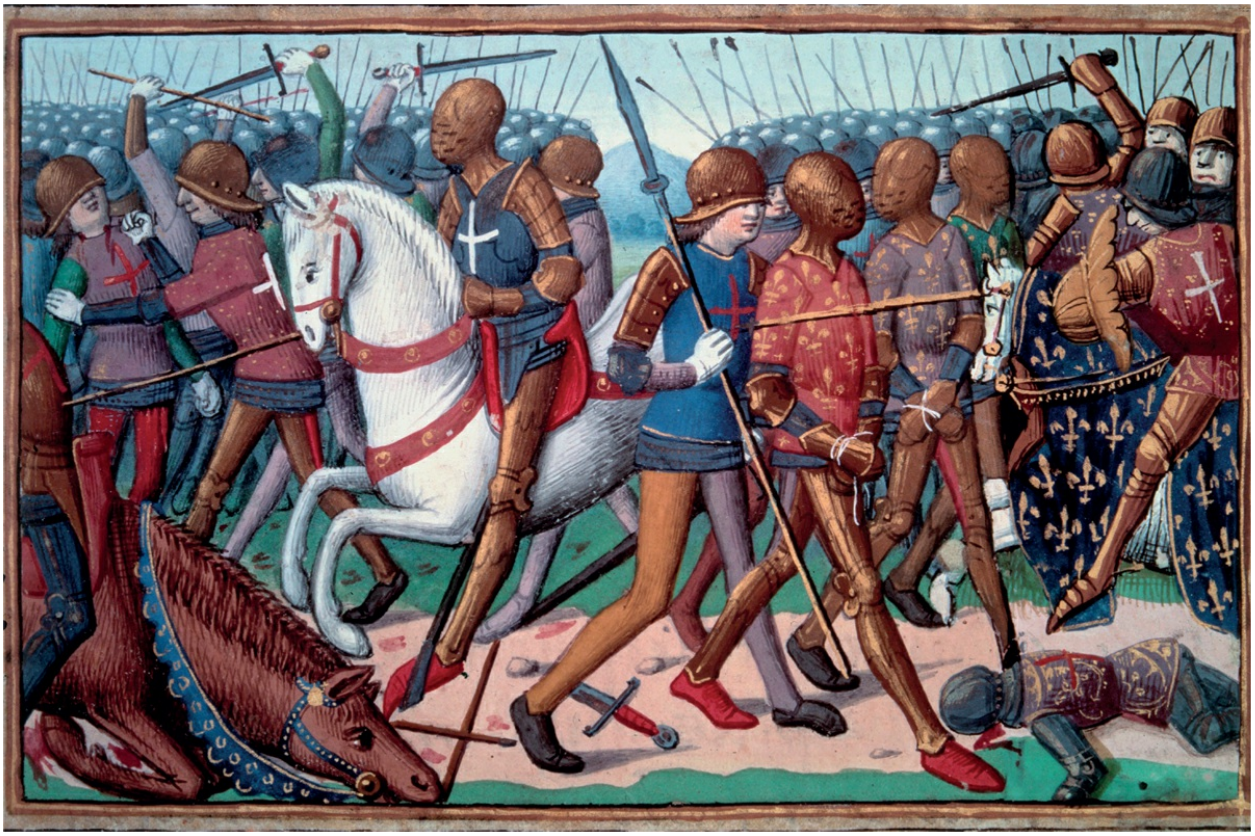
CRUSADE

Throughout the 13th century, some knights chose to venture on crusade to the Holy Land. The impetus for English knights to take part had come with Richard I as one of the leaders of the Third Crusade in 1190. After his death the monarchy remained influential as to who should be allowed to go, though the nobles now were effectively in control of the crusading forces who left the country. For the Fifth Crusade (1218–21), a number of English magnates and barons went overseas, including Ranulf Earl of Chester, Saher de Quincy Earl of Winchester, and Robert FitzWalter. Some, under the leadership of Simon de Montfort, father of that Simon who would make his name in England, joined the crusades against the Albigensian heretics. After the Holy Land was lost in 1291, campaigns against the Moors in Spain or the Teutonic Knights' crusades in Eastern Europe were alternatives.

A crusading background was good for family values. It was a surer way to heaven, since a crusader dying in battle did not have to wait in purgatory, and his lands were expected to be safe while he was away. Both crusades and tournaments probably assisted in making the knightly class increasingly exclusive.

THE MORAL WARRIOR

The idealistic vision of knighthood persisted into the 14th century. *Piers Plowman*, written by John Langland in the 1380s, repeats the notion of the 'pure order' of knighthood, and incorporates ideas such as fighting to defend the truth. Despite instruction otherwise, most people in England spoke English (rather than French) as a first language by the early 14th century, and contemporary romances embrace the idea of a national hero fighting for his country. In two poems knights are satirized as 'lions in hall, hares in the field'. Chaucer's high-minded chivalrous Knight fights in Prussia, Lithuania and Russia, Spain, North Africa, Anatolia and Armenia, and has jousted in the lists in Algeria – all very well except that it was not much practical help to his own country. Terry Jones has argued that the lack of heraldic display and the stained fustian jupon of Chaucer's Knight are signs of the professional fighting man, perhaps even modelled on Sir John Hawkwood of the White Company. Others disagree; but even if not technically a mercenary, Chaucer's dowdy Knight is a far tougher character than a first reading would imply, and almost certainly a contracted fighter.



This late 15th-century manuscript depicts English soldiers at the battle of Agincourt taking French knights and squires hostage. Such wealthy prisoners would usually be ransomed later for rich payment. Unfortunately Henry V, worried by the threat from the French third line, ordered most of the prisoners to be killed to prevent them turning on his soldiers if an attack occurred. (Leemage/Corbis via Getty Images)

With the upset in the church caused by the collapse of the powerful order of Knights Templar and loss of the Holy Land at the end of the 13th century, and the internal problems of the Hospitallers – another military and religious order, focused on defending the Holy Land – knights began to lose interest in the ideals set by the religious orders and looked elsewhere for inspiration. They turned increasingly to the romances, in particular those about King Arthur and Camelot. Edward I's conquest of Wales and early successes in Scotland strengthened the chivalric ideal and ensured it did not wither despite the setbacks of the early 14th century, until Edward III was able to utilize the enthusiasm for his own war aims in France.

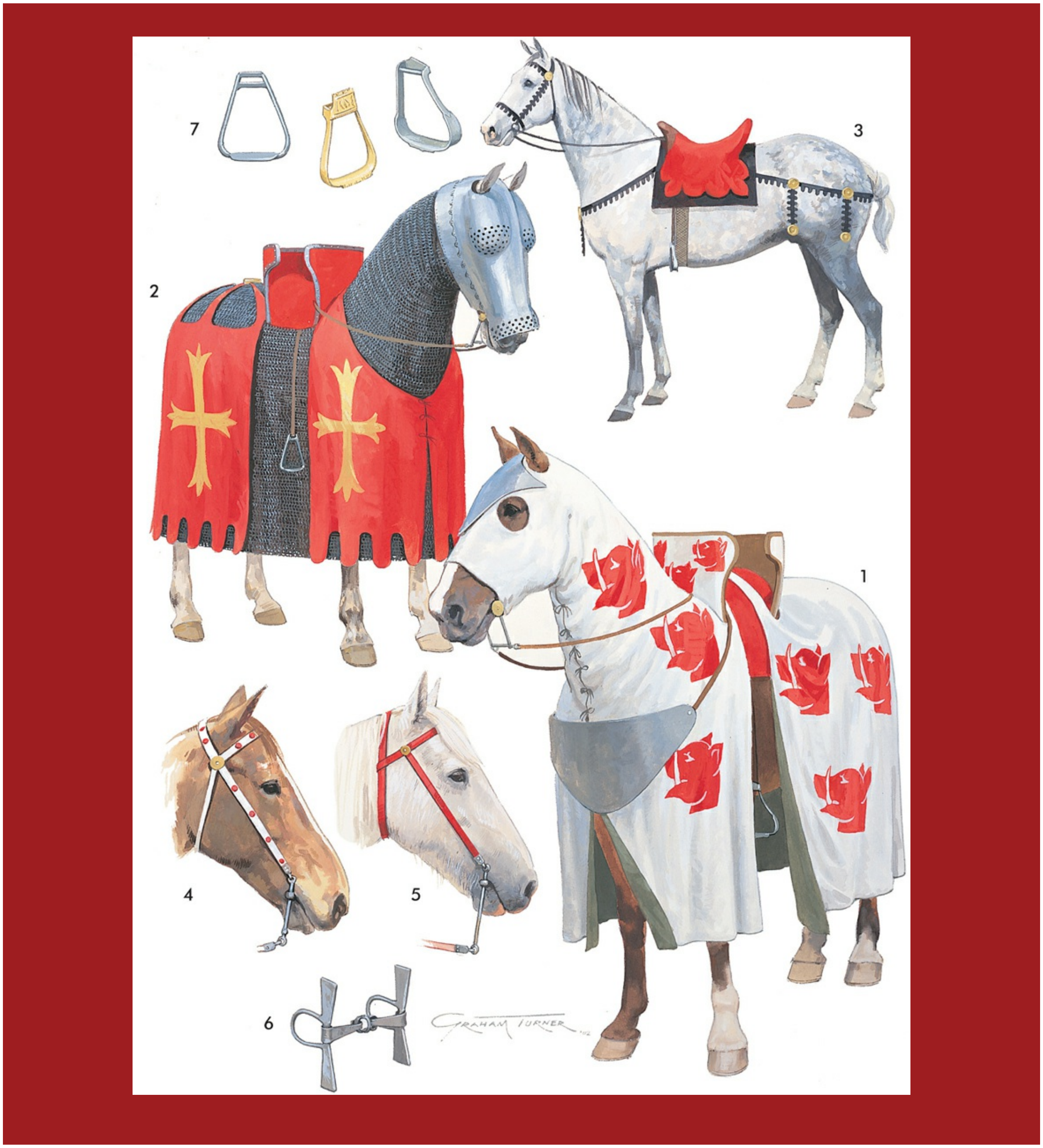
In 1344 at Windsor, Edward III proposed to found an Order of the Round Table, and during a 'Round Table' tournament he swore to found a chivalric order, a fellowship of knights bound together by oaths of mutual support. King John the Good of France founded a chivalric order, that of the Star, in 1351–52, but it was Edward's Order of the Garter (which was largely based on initial ideas for the French Order of the Star) that became the first in 1348. It soon had 24 member knights and before long 25 knights as well as the sovereign, which has remained the membership to this day. It may have had political overtones, but the connection with tournaments made it attractive to knights. There were also 26 priests and the same number of poor knights (religion and charity looked after by the order).

By the 15th century, chivalry had come to include the essential qualities expected of a knight: good manners, respect for women, protection of the church and the poor, and courage in the face of the enemy. All these ideals had become increasingly fused together during the centuries and were to be heard in the romances which were told and retold in knightly halls and courts throughout Europe. Knighthood too was a bond, since knights shared a common interest and were of a certain rank in society. Knights recognized foreign names and faces from tournaments in which they had fought opposite one another (or sometimes together), or from court visits. Such intercourse often bred respect for a worthy opponent.

However, chivalry was also in some respects a game, a courtly pursuit where gentlemen could show off their breeding and knowledge of how to behave in polite society, especially in the presence of ladies. They knew full well that in war chivalry often went by the board. Knights might well spare one another out of respect or humanity, but often more from a sense of lucrative gain to be made from a fat ransom. This was seen especially in France during the first part of the 14th century. Indeed, such profits could be ploughed back into land and castles, such as Ampthill in Bedfordshire, built from spoils taken by Lord Fanhope in France. In 1421 two English esquires, John Winter and Nicholas Molyneux, agreed to become brothers-in-arms in the wars in France, to pool their winnings and use them in England to buy lands and manors.

TYPES OF HORSE

The horse was, of course, vital to a knight. The destrier was the best warhorse and also the most expensive, sometimes confined to use in the tournament. So called from the Latin word for 'right' (*'dexter'*), it is believed it was led on the right hand or was trained to lead with the right foot. About the size of a modern hunter, it was its build and breeding rather than great height that gave it value. 1) Warhorse of about 1325 with primitive plate shaffron and early peytral over a cloth caparison. 2) Warhorse of the second half of the 14th century. The mail trapper, presumably with linen beneath for comfort and to absorb sweat, has a cloth caparison over it. 3) Cut leather decorated trappings of around 1380, for use on a warhorse or a good palfrey, the better sort of riding horse. Note the tied tail. 4–5) 14th-century bridles, fitted with curb bits. 6) Typical 14th-century style of snaffle bit with connecting ring and side bars. 7) Stirrups.

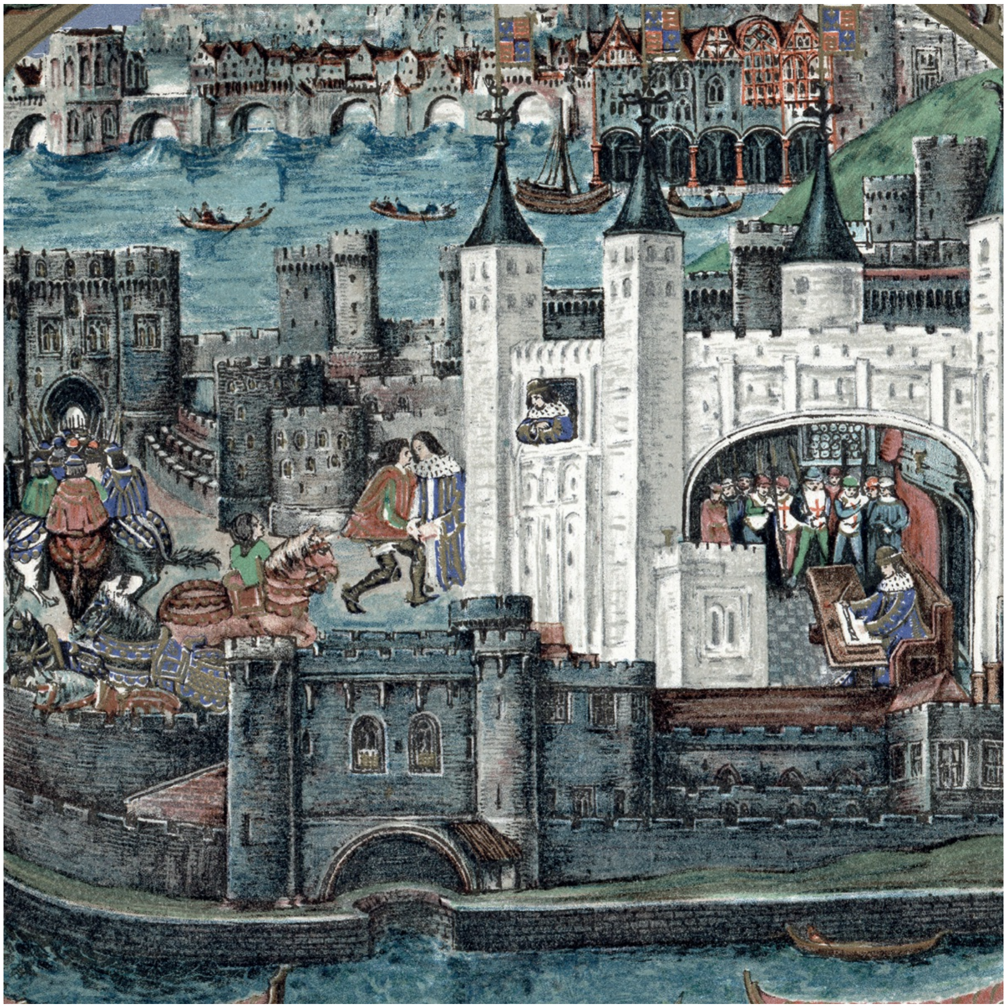


However, a tight situation called for drastic measures. The massacre of knightly prisoners at Agincourt by order of King Henry V himself is a case in point – Henry ignoring chivalry at a moment in the battle where the captured Frenchmen might have taken up arms as soon as the English were preoccupied with fresh attacks that now threatened them.

Increasingly, bands of professional men-at-arms were seen on the battlefields of Europe, men to whom a coat-of-arms was a relatively unimportant symbol that carried with it expectations of courage in the face of extreme danger which many of them preferred not to stay and face. Such moral courage was not profitable and the absence of recognizable arms prevented a slur on the family name. In England the practice of sparing men of rank was increasingly abandoned during the Wars of the Roses. Now families joined opposing sides in the hope of being able to use this opportunity to settle old grievances. Such motives did not sit well with chivalrous ideals, and those on the losing side might well find themselves at the receiving end of the *coup de grâce* instead of a proffered hand.

Chivalry was also used in diplomacy. Occasionally an effort was made to prevent a war by the offer of single combat between champions. Though frequently no more than verbiage, in 1425 Philip the Good of Burgundy made a serious challenge to Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, and even went into training and took fencing lessons. Despite having arms and tents made ready for the expected combat, diplomacy won the day and the contest never took place.

A knight could be degraded and removed from the order of knighthood for three felonies: treason, fleeing during a battle, and heresy. Latterly wasteful living was added. The ceremony to remove a shamed man from the ranks of knighthood is illustrated in the case of Sir Ralph Grey in 1464, who was convicted of treason. His spurs were hacked off, his coat-of-arms torn from his body and his armour was broken up. His sentence also decreed that his coat-of-arms be replaced by another that bore his arms reversed, but Edward IV excused him this part of the punishment.

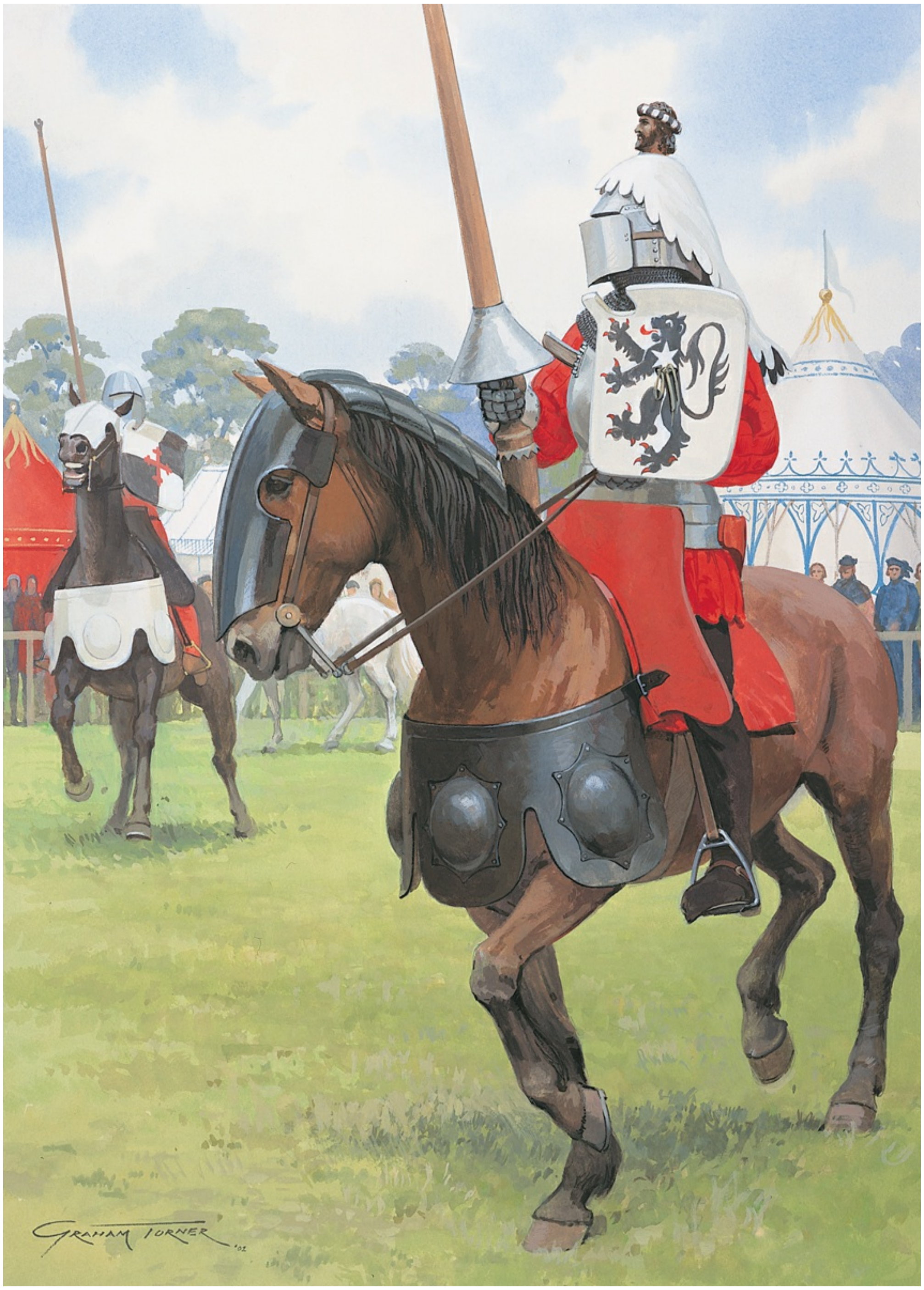


A late 15th-century depiction of the Duke of Orléans, captured at Agincourt in 1415, as a prisoner in the Tower of London. He seems to be represented several times: arriving; signing his release; watching at a window for the messenger; embracing him; and then riding out. (Universal History Archive/Getty Images)

The 15th century saw a resurgence of romance literature, resulting from a borrowing of such material in the pageants of this period. The stories of Charlemagne were translated from a 13th-century version in 1454 by Lord Berners, called *The Boke of Duke Huon of Bordeux*. New versions of stories about King Arthur were now being produced, the most famous being *Le Morte d'Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory, which was printed by Caxton in 1485 and widely distributed. Here was an author not producing work for the king but for his own peers, gentlemen and gentlewomen. The work of the 13th-century Majorcan writer, Raimon Llull, was translated by Caxton into English as *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry or Knyghthode*, carried out, we are told, at the request of ‘a gentyl and noble esquyer’. Other authors such as Gilbert de la Haye were also producing versions of the literature of chivalry.

Malory wrote at a time when the ideals of knighthood were subsumed by ceremonial. Lancelot, despite his weaknesses, is Malory’s ideal of chivalry, rather than Galahad, since the writer viewed chivalry largely as a secular entity. He makes Arthur into a great knightly hero, drawing on English romances. Unlike in French romances, many familiar knightly names, such as Gawain, are Arthur’s commanders as well as brave knights.

Malory echoes the reality of English courtly life, when great lords were also the king’s commanders in war. He also portrays the demise of courtly love, the idealism of holding a lady in high repute. As Iseult herself says to Tristram, love is an obstacle and will provoke ridicule in other knights for his taking her with him to Arthur’s court: ‘A! se how Sir Trystram huntyth and hawkyth and cowryth within a castell wyth hys lady, and forsakyth us.’ Personal feelings can spell doom to knighthood, as in the tragedy of Lancelot when he finally succumbs to Guinevere. It is enough that a knight perform good deeds. Caxton comments in his preface to Malory’s work: ‘For herein may be seen noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyté, frendlynesse, handynesse, love, frendshyp, cowardyse, murdre, hate, vertue, and synne, but t’exersyse and folowe vertu …’



JOUSTS OF PEACE, LATE 14TH CENTURY: The main figure is Brian Stapleton, a squire who took part in the celebrated jousts at St Inglevert in France in 1389. By this date the first specialized equipment for jousts of peace had appeared.

THE ROUND TABLE

Another social gathering was the Round Table, first mentioned in 1228 as a prohibited event and based on the stories of King Arthur. Jousting with blunted weapons and feasting were features of these occasions. A death at a contest at Walden in 1252 was considered an accident until the lance head used was found to be sharp instead of rebated; the knight responsible had had his leg broken by the dead man at a previous tournament. The first English king to hold a Round Table was Edward I in 1284, though this took place at Nefyn in Wales, to celebrate his victories there. Unlike his father, Edward enjoyed participating in tournaments and a number were held until the costs of real wars in Gascony, Wales and Scotland curtailed them. However, the kings now realized their popularity could be boosted by patronizing such events. In 1260 Edward took a large company of knights overseas to tournaments, only to be beaten, as he was again two years later.

THE TOURNAMENT

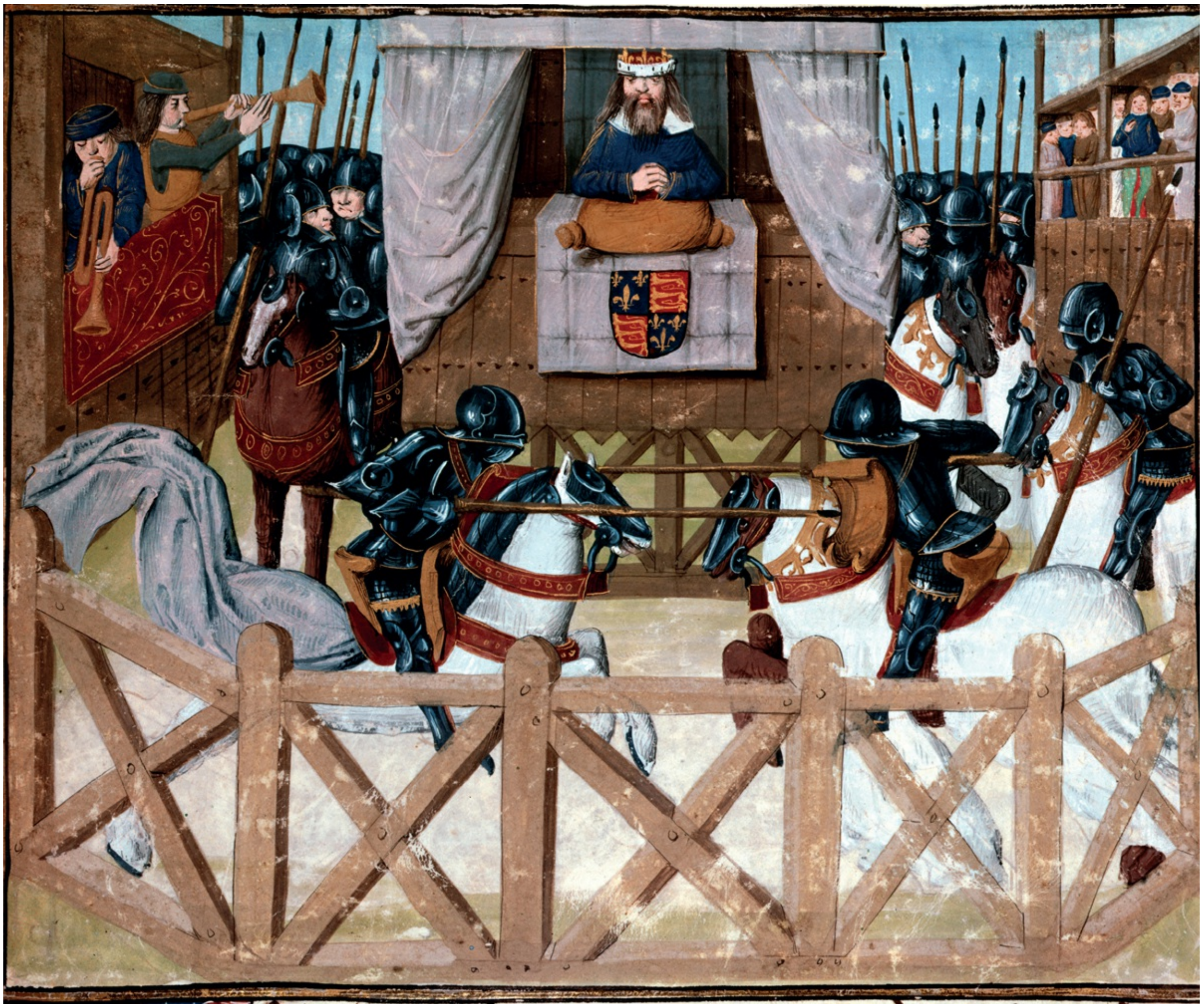
Even if many knights rarely fought in earnest, there was still the tournament in which to impress the sovereign, hone one's practical skills as a knight and potentially to demonstrate superior qualities of bravery and chivalry. Up to the 13th century, the idea of the tournament had been looked on in England with some suspicion, and tournaments were intermittently banned or restricted. In 1204, however, King John provided money for two of his foreign mercenaries to buy linen armour, presumably for tournament use. In 1215 tournaments were used as the occasions for meetings of the barons. The church had always been against tournaments because of their violence and threatened participants with excommunication, but in 1219 even the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury failed to stop the proceedings at Staines. Henry III also relaxed the ban until the rebellion of Richard Marshal in 1233–34.

Illicit tournaments continued to be held, however; one at Blyth in 1237 between northerners and southerners ended in an all-out battle and the papal legate was needed to quell the ill feeling. Even so, the violent contests continued.

Gradually permission was granted to hold events in England rather than cross the sea to France, where tournaments were permitted until 1260. At first the contests were still largely mock battles, or tourneys, between two teams of mounted knights, sometimes assisted by footsoldiers. The area chosen was often a stretch of countryside between two towns or villages and casualties could be heavy. Gradually the arena grew smaller and, by Edward I's reign, individual combats between two mounted knights with lances, called jousts, were growing in popularity. At the same time lances were increasingly rebated (blunted) or fitted with a coronel head with prongs instead of a single point, to dissipate the force of a blow, in what were known as jousts of peace. However, even these remained dangerous contests: in 1268 the heir of the Earl of Warenne died in a tournament at Croydon.

As well as attracting magnates with little to do, tournaments were frequented by younger sons with little prospect of landed wealth, who could use the tournament to win renown and take knights prisoner, when horse and armour or a ransom was paid as forfeit; William Marshal made his fortune by doing the circuit in this way. Moreover, the tournament was a useful area for richer men to recruit landless younger sons to their followings. Profit was bound up with honour, and in 1252 both were at stake when the Earl of Gloucester had to travel abroad to win back horses and armour lost by his brother William. Notions of chivalry also attached themselves to the tournament, with re-enactments of Arthurian scenes or other stories.

Less formal meetings were called behourds and seem to have been staged with the participants wearing linen armour, as happened at Blyth in 1258, the first contest attended by Prince Edward. Even so, deaths occurred at this event and Roger Bigod was brain damaged. There were also still problems with unrest. In 1288, squires dressed as friars and canons pretended to hold a behourd at Boston in Lincolnshire and ended up burning half the town down.



A late 15th-century depiction of a joust of war before Richard II at Smithfield in 1394. The knights wear field armour. In Richard's day the fleurs-de-lys had in fact not yet been reduced to three in each quarter of the shield. (Ann Ronan Pictures/Print Collector/Getty Images)

At the beginning of the 14th century, tournaments were still subject to a ban, largely because they were now seen as a threat to the recruitment of knights for real war. Edward I was quite keen on tournaments, however, and relaxed the bans during or after a campaign, as after Falkirk in 1302, apparently as a sort of reward for those who had supported him. Later in the century, most tournaments were held to celebrate a knighting or marriage, or very occasionally a triumphant return from battle. Many English knights still crossed the sea to joust, especially in the lavish tournaments held between about 1370 and 1385 at Bruges or Ghent by the dukes of Burgundy.

By the 14th century jousts had superseded the tourney, or team event, in popularity. There was as yet no barrier, and a man riding a powerful horse might deliberately set it against his opponent, in the hope of riding him down. Quite apart from this there was always the danger of accidental collisions, or knees being damaged from riding past too closely. The lance could be held at less of an angle than it would be when across a barrier, making it less likely to shatter. The development of chivalric ideals was increasingly being demonstrated in the lists, where a 'queen of love and beauty' might be chosen, and ladies' favours were sometimes worn by knights. Stands were often built for spectators, especially ladies and those of rank.

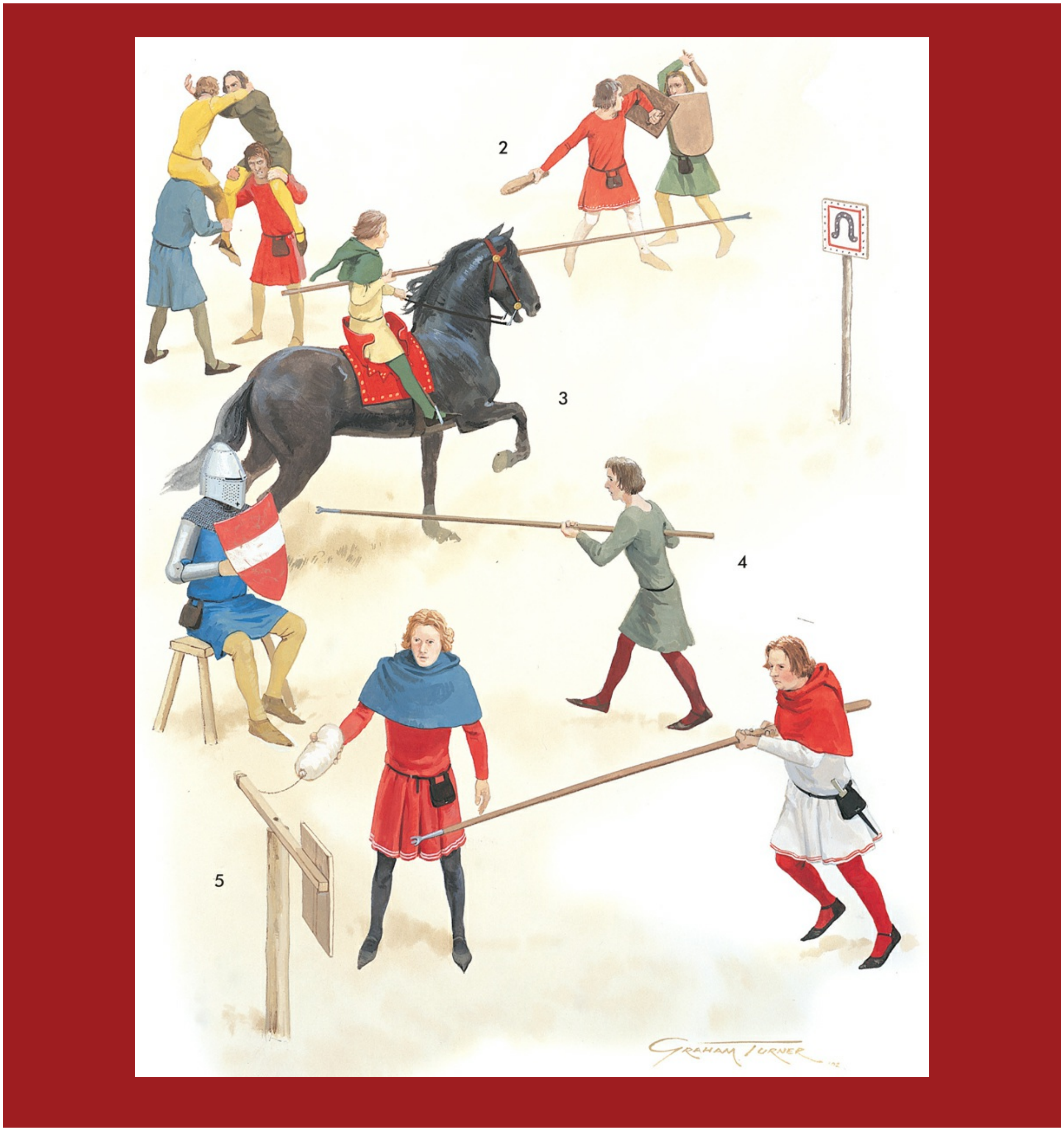
During the 15th century, the tournament was still a good place for the exercise of arms, but by now it had become as much a spectacle as training for war. Jousts of peace between two mounted opponents with blunted lances required specialized equipment and high saddles, so that a shattered lance was increasingly the accepted outcome rather than unhorsing.

By the 1420s the tilt had appeared in Italy, at first a cloth barrier but soon a stout wooden one, which separated the contestants to avoid collisions (deliberate or otherwise) and to help keep horses from running wide. The tilt did not help increase skill for war. However, some still preferred jousts of war with sharp lances *(à outrance)*, the armour being largely that worn in battle, and such contests were more dangerous, sometimes resulting in fatal injuries, though killing the opponent was never an objective. In one version, 'jousts at large' or 'at random', no tilt barrier was used; once the lances were dropped, the reinforces were removed and the two contestants could continue with swords. The tourney was similar, but involved two groups. Descended from the original form of the tournament, it still provided a spectacle. The club tourney, however, differed in that only clubs or rebated swords were used. Foot combats reflected the increasing tendency to dismount in battle, though in the sport set numbers of blows were agreed and delivered, with officials intervening if this was transgressed.

As aspiring bourgeois members of society rose to knightly rank, so those who were of such rank by birth used chivalry to identify with the king to preserve their status. Hence the threat from restive lords lessened, and monarchs were less suspicious of tournaments as an umbrella for intriguing nobles. Tournaments were now seen as a reflection of a ruler's wealth and magnanimity. However, in England the expense of these festivities was becoming prohibitive, and in the 15th century they became increasingly rare. Some events were held, such as that to celebrate the coronation of Joan of Navarre, the queen of Henry IV, in February 1402, depicted in the later 15th-century Pageant of Richard Beauchamp. Knights wishing to participate in or view such scenes often had to travel abroad, especially to Burgundy, where the dukes put on lavish displays to emphasize their power, such as in the *pas d'armes*, where one or more knights or squires held a piece of ground against all comers. In the case of the *pas de la belle pèlerine*, held near Calais by the Bastard of St Pol in 1449, heralds visited England and Scotland to proclaim the event.

TRAINING

Squires and knights needed to practise constantly in order to keep muscles supple and to hone their skills. It is possible that on occasion double-weight weapons were used, so that normal weapons would feel much easier to swing. Most of these illustrations are based on those seen in the Flemish *Romance of Alexander*, of 1335–48. 1) Wrestling from pick-a-back. 2) Fighting with wooden swords. 3) Practising controlling the powerful warhorses by riding against the quintain, a post with a shield attached to it. 4) Running with a lance against a seated knight. 5) Running against a quintain on which a pivoting arm has a shield set at one end and a weight at the other; striking the target spun the weighted end and a man had to pass quickly and duck to avoid it. Other combative sports such as quarter staff were also indulged in.

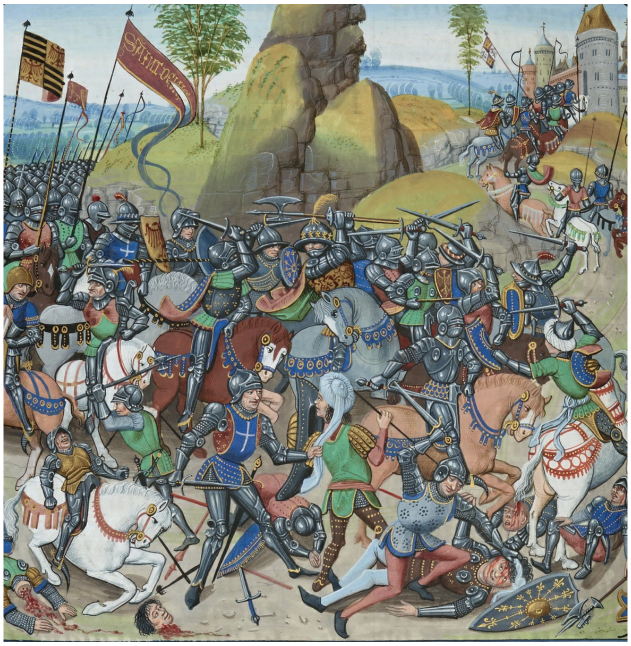


The *pas d'armes de l'Arbre d'Or* was based on the story of Florimont, the knight of the Golden Tree who served the Lady of the Secret Isle. It was held in the market place at Bruges in July 1468, to celebrate the marriage of Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, and Margaret of York. On the sixth day Anthony Woodville, Lord Scales, brother-in-law to Edward IV, challenged the Bastard of Burgundy, whom he had fought in a duel the previous year. Such was their comradeship, now sworn brothers-in-arms, that the Bastard declined the challenge and instead asked Adolf of Cleves to step into the role of defender. There followed some excellent jousts: Cleves shattered 17 lances against Scales' 11 but the main casualty was the Bastard himself, who was kicked above the knee by a horse while he watched, and at one point was feared to be dying. After the tourney, feasting ended the whole event, with 30 centrepiece gardens each with a golden hedge and golden tree. A whale arrived accompanied by giants, and sirens appeared from the whale to sing; the giants then fought a battle with 12 sea-knights. The Duke of Burgundy was awarded the prize for the tournament but refused and gave it instead to John Woodville, the English queen's brother.

Challenges to combats *à outrance* were not uncommon in the 15th century, though these usually involved meeting knights from other lands. These were much less spectacular than the types of displays just described and involved a variety of sharp weapons instead of the blunted lances that predominated in the past. There was more variety in the combat too, with knights fighting on foot as well as mounted, as in real war. While all tournaments were risky, these combats were more dangerous. Despite this rougher quality, they too gradually acquired a courtly element, and challenges were sent out as formal letters. The knights who took part were those who enjoyed the extra thrill of fighting with sharp weapons; they might be men out to win renown, or bands of knights grouped into a kind of order to demonstrate their skills in arms. The challenger often wore a badge or something similar, such as a garter, and this might also be the chosen prize.

For a knight of quality, appearance at any large spectacle would necessitate a show of wealth on his part, not only in his armour and weapons but also in his horse trappings, the costumes of his attendants and, occasionally, in the largesse he might distribute.

THE KNIGHT ON CAMPAIGN AND IN BATTLE



This late 15th-century depiction from Froissart's *Chroniques*, of the battle of Montiel on 14 March 1369 – in which the Black Prince fought the French during the Castilian Civil War – graphically illustrates the brutality of medieval warfare. (Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

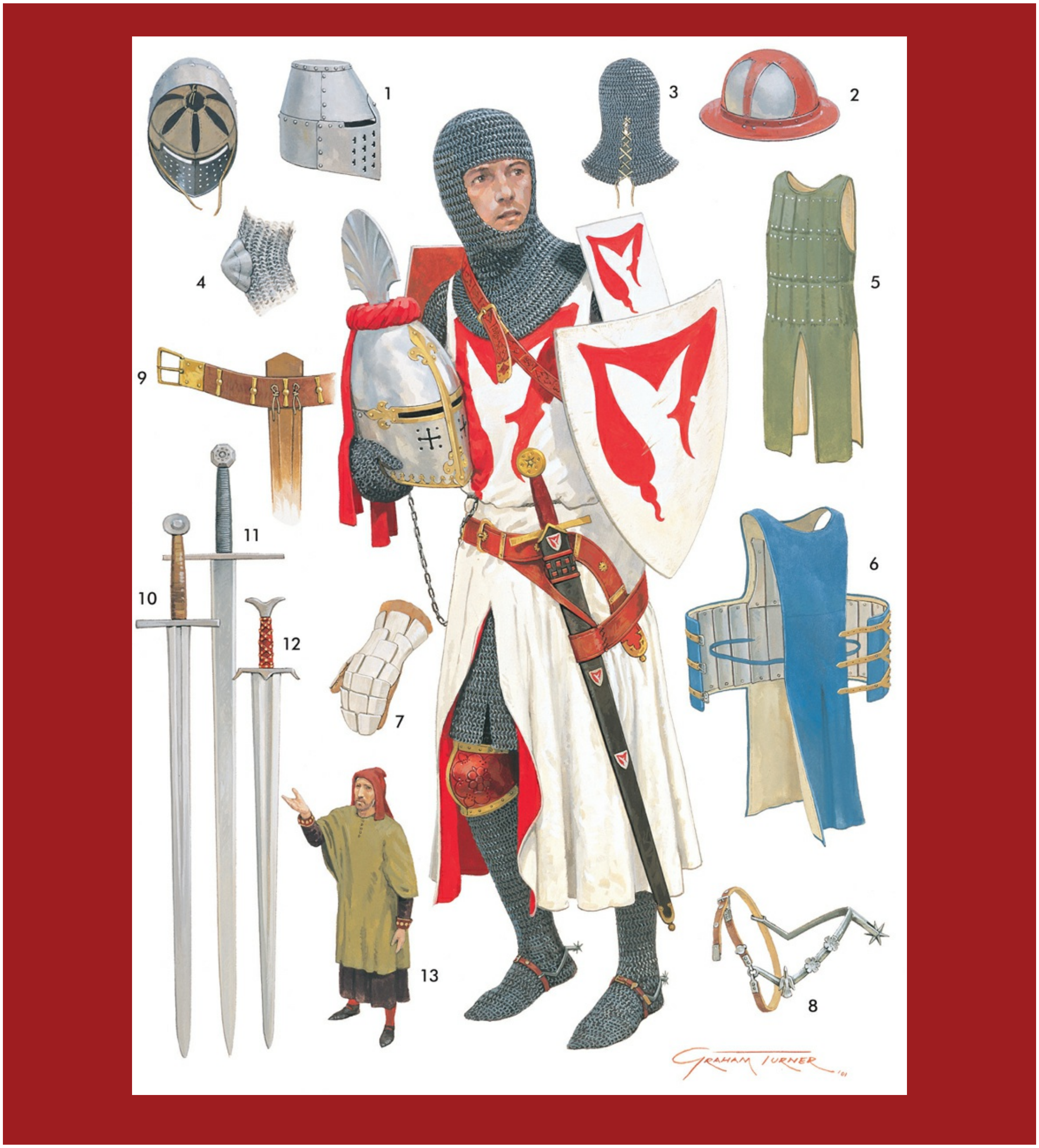
Although history has made much of the individual knight's martial skills, in reality the success, or otherwise, of a campaign often depended upon far more mundane matters. The truth was, campaigning could be difficult.

CAMPAIGN LIFE

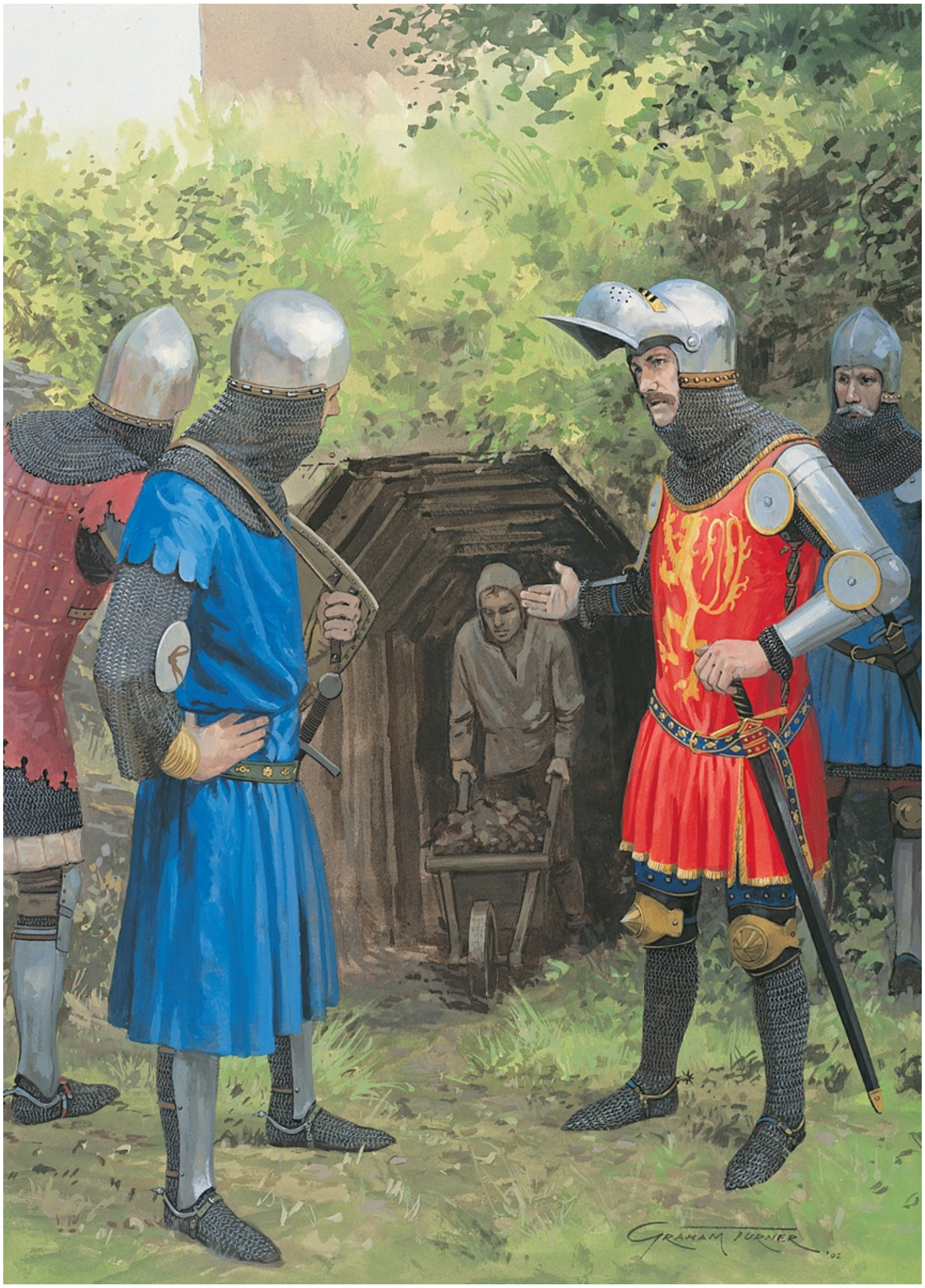
Life for the knight on campaign could be miserable or comfortable, depending on several factors. The actual rank of a knight would play a large part. A duke took several tents, campaign furniture, even hangings for the interior of his tent, and copious supplies of food and wine. A poor knight took what he could afford: a tent for himself, and supplies for his few followers.

KNIGHT, *c*.1290

By the late 13th century, many knights were wearing a coat of plates, or occasionally even a cuirie, beneath their surcoat but over their mail coat. This figure is of a knight of the Hastings family. 1) Helm, Italian, *c*.1300. 2) Kettle hat. 3) Separate coif, with rear slit tightened by a lace, obviating the need for a ventail. 4) Couter, from effigy of William Longespée the Younger, Salisbury Cathedral. 5) Suggested appearance of a reinforced surcoat. 6) Coat of plates, showing vertical plates riveted inside. 7) Reconstruction of a gauntlet covered in whalebone plates. 8) Reconstruction of a rowel spur, from fragments, *c*.1300. 9) Sword belt secured to scabbard by two laces. 10) Great sword, Burrell Collection, Glasgow, c.1270–1330. 11) Great sword, *c*.1250–1350. 12) Sword, Royal Armouries, *c*.1250–80. 13) Garnache with hood.



The setting for the campaign also affected the way a knight lived. English armies in France could, when necessary, take food from the surrounding countryside or from captured towns, in which case a knight with a keen eye could see himself and his men well stocked. The chevauchée, a mounted raid deep into enemy territory, was also a good way to deny the enemy his own provisions, and it was a slap in the face to the lord supposedly protecting the area. Similarly, booty was forthcoming, either from battlefield plunder, items from towns or else from ransoming important prisoners, who were far more willing to give themselves up to another knight than to a ruffian archer or billman. The benefits of plunder, however, might be offset by the knowledge that the army could be on campaign for weeks or months, that sieges were liable to drag on, and that, especially in the latter case, disease was very likely to strike. The campaigning season for medieval armies was traditionally the months from spring until autumn, but in reality knights found themselves on campaign in less than ideal conditions. The battle at Towton in Yorkshire, fought in a bitter blizzard in March 1461, is well known; the battle of Wakefield fought the December before is less so.



THE MINE AT CORMICY, 1359: During the siege of Rheims, Lord Bartholomew Burghersh (right) ordered a mine dug and invited the enemy castellan, Sir Henry de Vaulx, to come out under safe conduct and see the danger he was in. When Sir Henry saw that the tower's foundations were only held up by props, he accepted honourable surrender for all his men.

It was a captain's duty to ensure that his men were kept under control where possible. Henry V forbade plundering in France and hanged an archer who stole a pyx from a church. However, Henry did endeavour to ensure that his men were paid and adequately fed, though even he could not always prevent the slaughter and looting that followed the fall of a town, as happened at Caen in 1417. Since this was accepted practice in cases where surrender had initially been refused, there was little even the king could do. When a town was taken, a garrison was installed, including knights, all commanded by a captain. Some knights might remain in the town for years, or at least until their contract expired. If single they might even marry French women. During Henry V's reign some knights would have settled in Normandy, being granted estates in return for military duties. Nobles would also have received large parcels of land in return for duties such as the upkeep of the local castle and its garrison.

LOGISTICS OF 15TH-CENTURY WARFARE

In order to carry enough provisions for a large force, many wagons were needed, sometimes more than could reasonably be procured. The armour of the captains, armoured knights and other retainers would be carried in carts, the pieces perhaps wrapped in hay in locked barrels, but other soldiers, both mounted and foot, carried their own, together with any spares, a blanket and a day's food ration. Food was an obvious essential, together with ale and wine casks. However, room also had to be made for the large number of arrow sheaves carried for the use of the archers, each bound sheaf consisting of about 24 shafts. Spare heads and shafts were also necessary.

A well-armed force might also have cannon in its train, for which specially cut stone balls, cast lead or, towards the end of the century, cast iron balls, had to be carried, as well as gunpowder and all the paraphernalia necessary to lay and fire the guns: rammers, powder ladles, sponges, scourers, linstocks, etc. Occasionally older forms of siege engines, such as catapults (some built on site or from transported sections) and sheds were called upon, requiring ropes, grease and nails. Mobile forges were a necessity both for armourers and farriers. Bedding and tents for the wealthier men, together with creature comforts – folding chairs, beds, sideboards, chests of various sizes – added to the bulk of material carried. As well as food for the troops, fodder was sometimes also carried for the horses used by mounted contingents, and for pack animals and draught horses or oxen. When supplies ran short, they had either to be taken by force or bought, so large amounts of money had to be carried in barrels or chests.

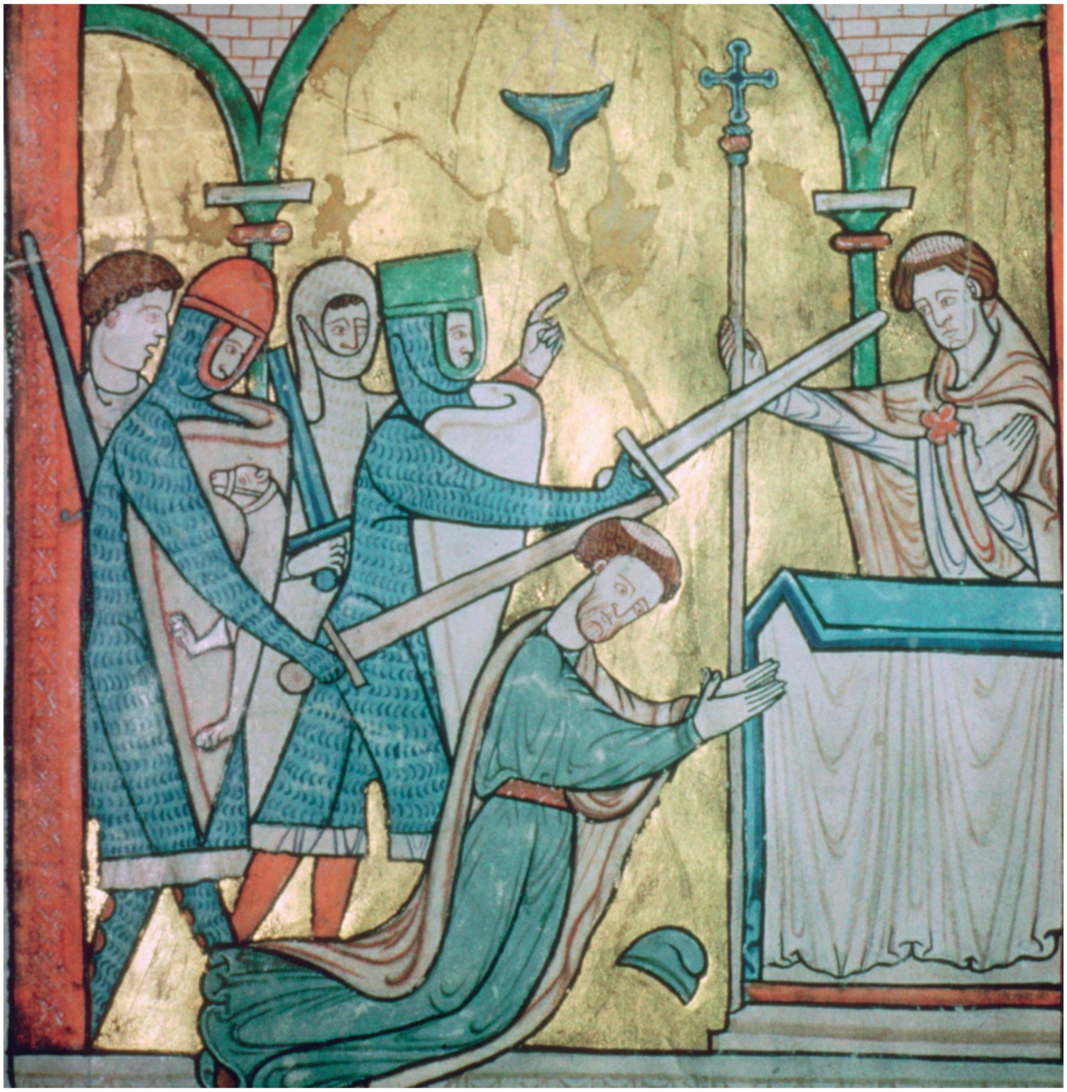
Much of a campaign was taken up in marching, in hot sun and soaking rain, over unmade roads sometimes turned to bogs.

In siege actions, knights often sat in front of a castle for weeks with little to do unless an assault was planned, but the chance to win renown via a scaling ladder was also highly dangerous. Sometimes knights would ride off with their escorts to visit a tournament, where rules of chivalry would prevent them being arrested. A typical knight had several followers, at least one of whom would have been a valet, whose duty it was to look after his master. Damaged armour would need repairing by the armourers who moved with the army; swords had to be honed. The knight's followers would find him lodgings or tents that could be paid for with coin, or else would erect his own tent.

A knight's status meant that he also had money enough to pay for food or other items. However, a noble had to rely on his retainers and his household to supply the core of his forces. These were the only reliable followers he had; some of them were knights like himself, who went with him in peace or war. The retainers themselves also brought tenants, but if these tenants refused to come, or deserted, if the arrayed troops supplied to the lord did not materialize, then he could not deliver an effective force for a campaign.

In England during the Wars of the Roses, the campaigns tended to be much shorter. For one thing England is much smaller than France, but there were significantly few sieges of towns or cities during this period, most of the conflict taking the form of violent battles or skirmishes. Despite this, some historians have calculated that an average campaign lasted only 23 days. However, it was not foreign soil over which the armies marched, and therefore any pillaging would cause widespread distrust and unrest among the king's subjects; the only exception was campaigns into Scotland during this period.

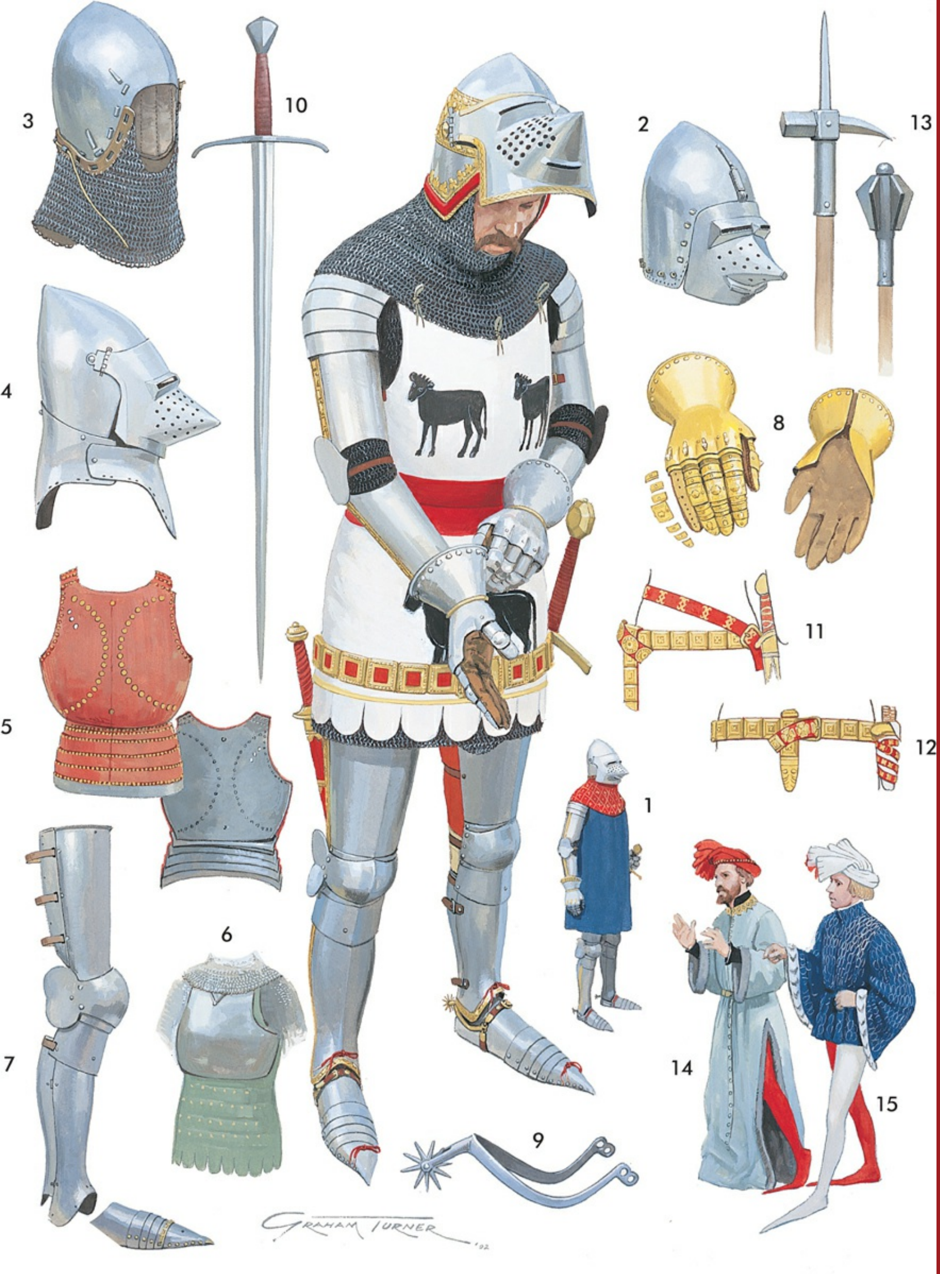
Commanders were aware that if money ran short then pay and food supply suffered and men would desert. It meant that the troops were best recruited and moved swiftly while they were relatively happy. The author of the *Boke of Noblesse*, which was addressed to Edward IV before his French expedition in 1475, suggests that unpleasant excesses by troops in earlier campaigns were caused by a lack of proper and regular pay. One factor made these campaigns different from those in the earlier part of the century. Lords and arrayed troops often chose the opposite side to that of a rival so they could resolve differences by force. Thus a number of titled men perished, being killed on the field or executed afterwards instead of being taken prisoner for ransom, such was the sense of revenge felt by families for one another. The chivalric code between knights was passed over in the pursuit of bloody retribution, and the chance of dying a violent death during a campaign was perhaps greater than had previously been the case.



Noble bearing and ethical codes did not prevent knights from performing acts of historical notoriety. This illustration, from a late 12th-century psalter, shows the murder of St Thomas Becket on 29 December 1170. The leader of the murderers is the knight Reginald FitzUrse, denoted here by the bear on his shield. (CM Dixon/Print Collector/Getty Images)

KNIGHT AND EQUIPMENT, *c.*1390

Sir Hugh Calveley, based on his effigy at Bunbury, Cheshire, wears a tight padded jupon over his armour. Beneath it, are separate breast- and backplates, the former with a skirt hanging from internal leather straps. A full mail coat and padded aketon were usually still worn underneath. The sabaton is tied to the shoe, and also laced to the hinged greave. The poleyn is attached to a plate cuisse by pivoting rivets, and the cuisse has a tab to tie it to points from the undergarment. Plate vambraces are laced at the shoulder by two points threaded through holes in a leather tab riveted to the top of the enclosing upper cannon. The helmet visor can be removed by pulling out the pin on each arm near the pivot. The jewelled sword belt probably hung from hidden hooks at the hips, balanced by a rondel dagger. 1) A loose form of jupon. The aventail is covered by a decorative cloth covering. 2) German basinet showing the form of the *Klappvisier*. 3) Basinet with aventail. The top of the mail was stitched to a leather band. Slits in the band were forced over vervelles along the edge of the helmet, and secured by a cord through the vervelles. 4) Late 14th-century great basinet with plate collar. 5) Breastplate riveted to a covering, with attached fauld and holes for a lance-rest, based on a German example. 6) Independent breastplate, late 14th century. 7) Cuisse, poleyn, greave and sabaton for right leg, from the boy's armour in Chartres Cathedral. The deep lower plate of the poleyn now articulates with the greave, probably by a turning pin. 8) Hour-glass latten gauntlets of the Black Prince. A plate was shaped to cover the back and sides of the hand. Overlapping plates (scales) were riveted to leather strips that were stitched to the glove and riveted to the main plate. 9) Reconstructed tinned rowel spur, late 14th century. 10) Sword from the Great Ouse at Ely, *c.*1370–1400. 11) Sword belt, from effigy of Sir Humphrey Littlebury (1360), at Holbeach, Lincs. 12) Sword belt with smaller belt now twisted round scabbard, from effigy of Lord Montacute (1389), Salisbury Cathedral. 13) Hammer and mace. 14) Long houppelande with side vents, piked soled hose and hood-turban. 15) Short houppelande, piked soled parti-coloured hose, and hood-turban.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THE KNIGHT IN BATTLE

IDENTIFICATION

Flags took several forms. The pennon or pennoncelle was a small triangular flag nailed to the lance behind the head, and was painted with the owner's arms. Bannerets had a banner, in the 13th century usually a slim rectangular flag with the longest side against the staff, where it was nailed or tied in place. Banners bore their owner's arms and were carried by banner bearers whose duty was to stay close to their lord. The lord's arms during the 13th century could also be carried by all of his followers. In 1218 a robber is recorded buying 100 marks' worth of cloth for his band as though he were a baron or an earl, suggesting that followers could be equipped in coats of the same colour at least. Barons and knights had the right to have their knights and squires wear a badge or uniform.

In battle men looked to their lord's banner, which was usually carried furled and only broken out when fighting was expected. Its symbolism was of high import: if it fell or was captured there was a risk of panic, and it would be protected by several tough men. Signals were given by trumpet or by hand, especially if the noise made shouting ineffective. Trumpets were also used to call the troops to arms before battle. War cries were used to frighten the enemy and bolster courage.

When fighting on foot the knight relied in part on his following – his squires, household and retained men – to watch his back. In the 14th century he might wear a jupon with his coat-of-arms displayed on front and rear, but equally some were plain and a warrior with his visor down was then difficult to recognize. As well as the banner, for his followers, a man of rank might, by the end of the century, also have a standard, a long flag perhaps carrying the red cross of St George next to the fly, then elements of his heraldic coat, such as main charges and colours, and perhaps his motto, the war-cry shouted to rally and encourage his men.

By the 15th century, surcoats were increasingly discarded and, with a lack of shields, it was essential that the banner-bearer remain close to his master, following his horse's tail, as it was said. A lord might give the order not to move more than 10 feet (or a similar measurement) from the standards, but if the line slightly shifted it would not be too difficult in the confusion of battle to strike out accidentally at an ally.

In order to carry out heraldic identification and to deliver messages, important nobles employed their own heralds wearing tabards of their master's arms, and trumpeters with the arms on hangings below the instruments.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

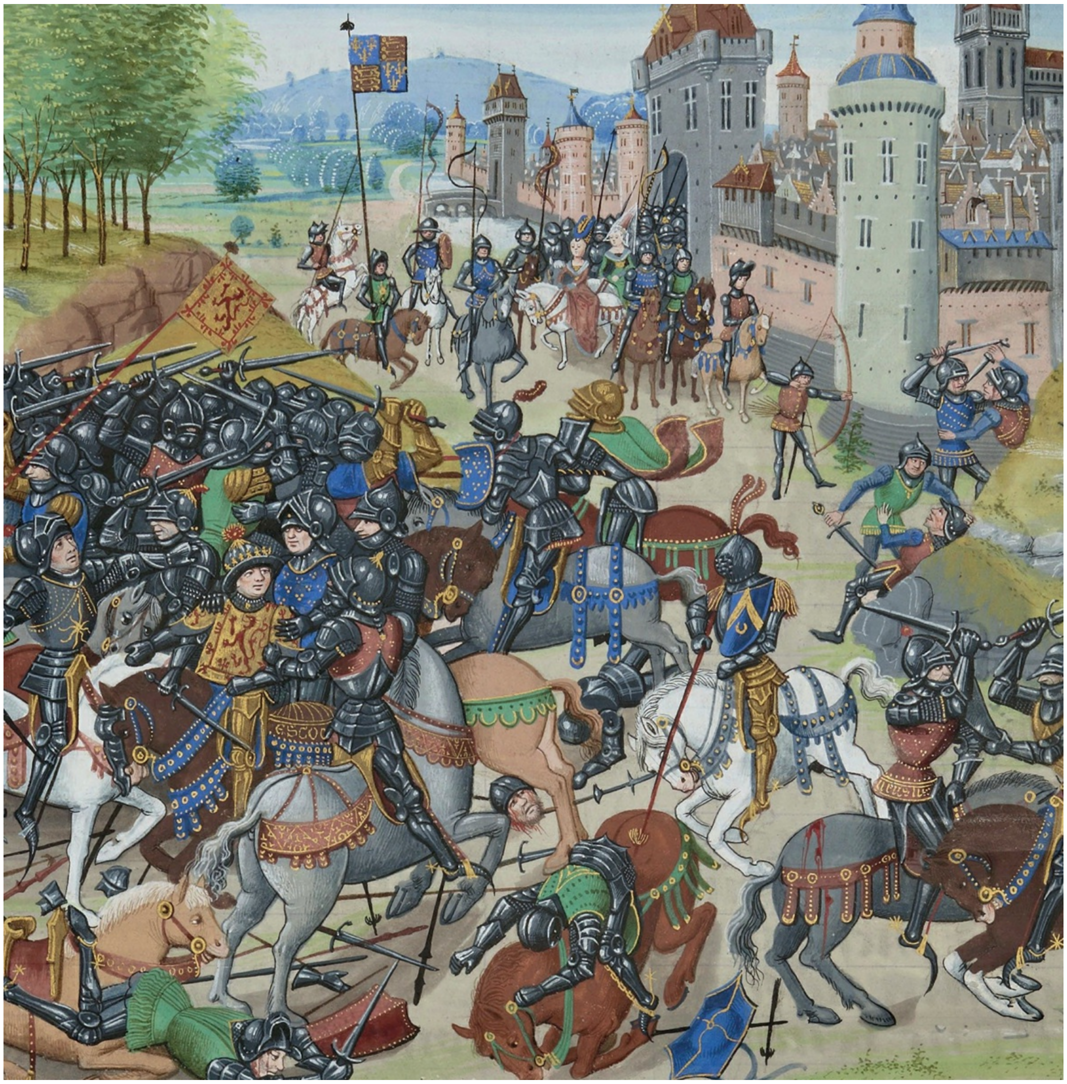
The outcome of a war in the medieval age hung not merely upon skill at arms; in fact, this could actually be a secondary factor. John made an abortive attempt to invade Wales in 1211 that failed because of a lack of supplies; Llywelyn and the Welsh collected their belongings and cattle and withdrew into the mountains. In 1265 Simon de Montfort's troops were unable to get their normal food and suffered from having to live off the land in Wales. Edward I fought no major battles in Wales – the ground was wrong for cavalry and the Welsh fought more as guerrillas. Knights were often hampered by the mountainous terrain but the English were nevertheless victorious in two engagements. Edward instead used attrition. He launched his first campaign against Wales both by land and sea, using labourers and woodcutters to make a road through the forests, building castles and cutting off the grain supply from Anglesey. In 1282 a bridge of boats was built to cross to Anglesey.

The king used similar tactics against the Scots. The first campaign in 1296 was completed in just over five months, with Scotland annexed to England. After his victory at Falkirk in 1298 he was able to provision his garrisons. He was in Scotland again in 1300, besieging Caerlaverock Castle and leading his armies across the country, but the Scots withdrew and refused battle. English armies would always be hampered by problems of supply in Scotland: the further they ventured, the longer the lifeline to England became. Moreover, many English-held castles were scattered and remote, making it difficult to march swiftly from one to another, or to relieve a fortress if besieged.

Scouts were used to locate enemy forces, after which the commanders tried to work out the best way to proceed. Armies made use of terrain where possible, and were careful to protect a flank if feasible. William Marshal, in a speech to his troops before the second battle of Lincoln in 1217, pointed out how the enemy's division of his force meant that Marshal could lead all his men against one part alone. Other commanders were less prudent or simply hotheaded. The decision by the Earl of Surrey in 1297 to cross Stirling Bridge with the Scots in near proximity was foolhardy, since there was a wide ford 2 miles upstream that would have allowed a flank attack, and indeed Sir Richard Lundy had suggested this move. As it turned out, William Wallace and Andrew Murray attacked before even half the English force was across the bridge and the majority of those caught on the wrong bank were crushed.

When Edward was in direct control he proved a good tactician, as he showed at Evesham in 1265. He advanced to stop Simon de Montfort reaching Kenilworth, and divided his army into three battles to block his escape. Caught in a loop of the River Avon, Simon's vain hope of killing Edward was dashed when the second battle swung into his flank while the third blocked any escape back south.

In his Scottish campaign of 1298, Edward brought 2,500 heavy cavalry and probably about 15,000 infantry. At Falkirk he faced the Scots arrayed in their schiltrons, tightly packed formations presenting a hedge of spears towards any attacker. They may have additionally fortified the position with wooden stakes. Again, disagreement was found among the division leaders: having skirted to the right of wet ground, the Bishop of Durham sensibly wanted to wait for the earls of the left-hand division to come level, and for the king who was bringing up the centre. But the impetuous young Ralph Bassett urged the cavalry on. Swinging out round the flanks, the two English divisions rode down the Scottish archers stationed between the schiltrons, and the Scottish cavalry broke and fled. However, the horsemen could not break the determined Scottish ranks of spears and it was the move by the king to bring up his archers and crossbowmen that helped prevent his knights dashing themselves to pieces. English cavalry deterred the Scots from breaking their ranks, and they were then forced to stand their ground until the archers withdrew, allowing the cavalry finally to break through. Even so, over 100 horses were killed. It should be noted that there appear to have been more cavalrymen in the battle than archers, and that crossbowmen were also used. Edward does not seem as yet to have developed his tactic of using massed longbows to decimate enemy ranks.



This late 15th-century picture of the battle of Neville's Cross in 1346 shows fallen warhorses. Despite their power, horses proved vulnerable to English archers, especially when using hunting broadhead arrows with wide cutting surfaces. (Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

Knights at this time still often fought from horseback, changing to their destriers or coursers from the palfreys they used for riding. There is no evidence that cavalry routinely dismounted during the Welsh wars.

When delivered correctly the charge of the heavy horse was a formidable weapon that could smash a hole in enemy ranks. The charge began as a walk, increasing speed when within suitable range so that the horses would not be blown or the formation disorganized when the final push came. The mounted charge could still be highly effective, the knights riding almost knee to knee with lowered lances in the hope of steam-rollering over the opposition. The lance usually shattered during the first charge, the stump being dropped and, if need be, the sword was drawn, or perhaps a mace or horseman's axe. Inventories from the 13th century show that horses killed in battle largely belong to knights and those with mounts of quality; in other words, the knights formed the front line.

Another problem with a mounted charge was discipline. As happened at Lewes, the charge by Prince Edward's cavalry was successful but the elated horsemen kept going, pursuing their opponents so far as to put themselves out of the battle as well. The threat of the front line being completely penetrated was one reason commanders sometimes used a reserve, as did Simon de Montfort at Lewes. The knights who burst through might turn and strike the rear of the enemy line. The reserve was also quite often the position of the commander, with subordinates controlling the forward battles.

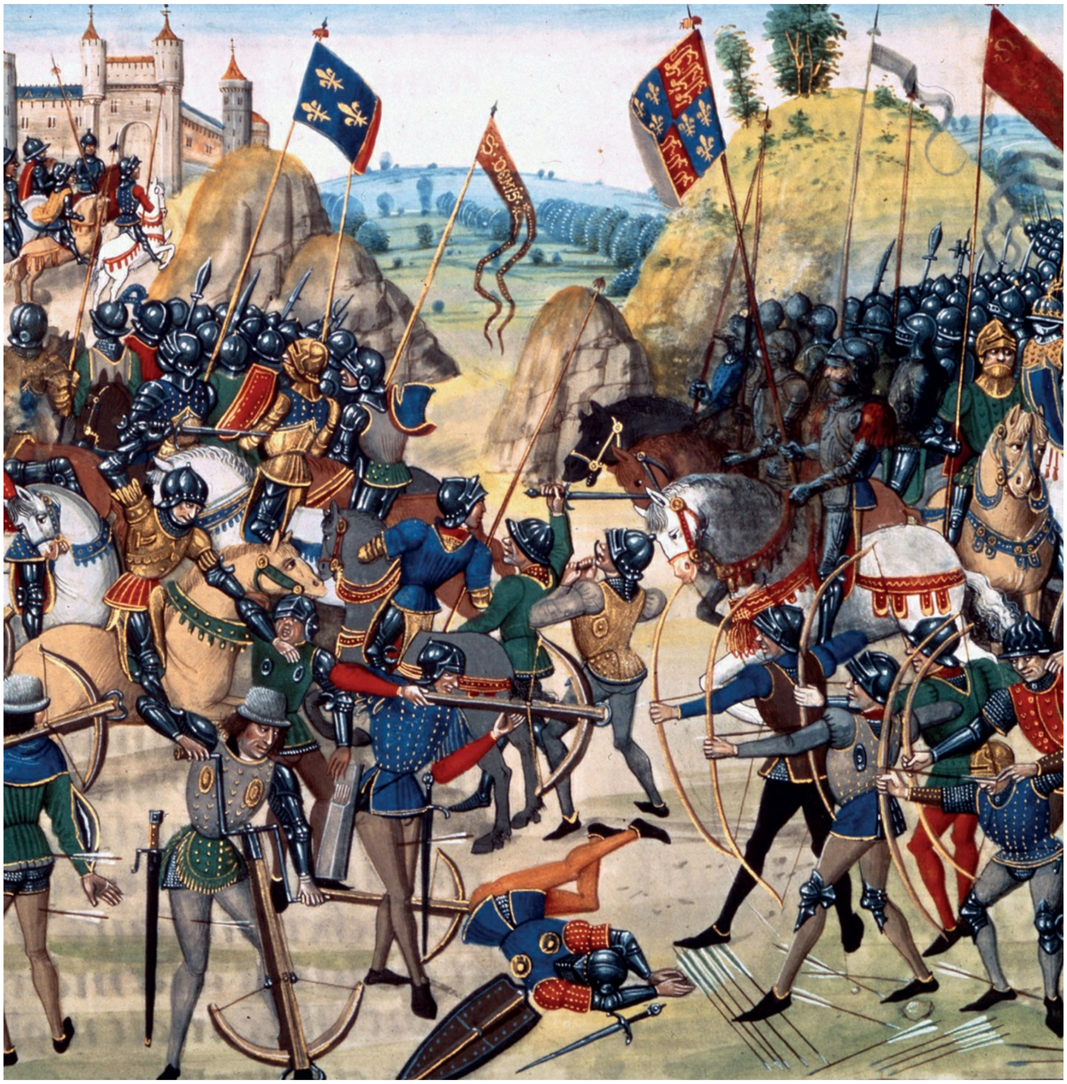
During the 14th century war was conducted in a number of ways. The chevauchée was one method. Like the well-tried feudal tactics that preceded it, the aim was to disrupt the economy of the area by swift movement, seizing food for the soldiers and destroying crops, villages and peasants (thereby insulting the lord of the place into the bargain) while evading danger to oneself by avoiding castles unless they were easy to capture.

Successful battles for the English required the use of cavalry to smash a hole in the enemy ranks, and the matchless skills of the English archers. However, as in the previous century, there were times when the cavalry shock manoeuvre could not be used effectively, for example in the bogs and mountains of Wales or against the Scottish schiltrons.

The young Edward III composed his forces so that the bulk of infantry were bowmen, and were mostly mounted to assist swift movement on the march. His men-at-arms were much more likely now to dismount on the battlefield to form the front divisions (called 'battles'). Where possible, they stood in a naturally defended position with their archers, thus forcing the enemy to wear themselves out attacking them, a style of warfare first tested in battle against the Scots. Froissart describes how, in 1327, when Edward's troops encountered the Scots, they were ordered to dismount and take off their spurs before forming themselves into three battles. In 1332 a force of the 'disinherited Scots' under the pretender Balliol (in fact pretty much an English force) invaded Scotland

and after an abortive attack on the Scottish camp on the River Earn, formed a single block of dismounted men-at-arms at Dupplin Muir, with wings of archers and a small mounted reserve. The Scots, under the Regent, Donald, Earl of Mar, withered under the archery, and many of Balliol's men-at-arms remounted to chase the routed enemy.

When Edward launched his main campaign against France, the English took their new double-pronged strategy with them. The first encounter in France was in 1342 when the English, driven back from the siege of Morlaix, formed up with a wood at their backs, a stream on one flank and dug a ditch to protect the front. Despite being pushed back to the woods, the English held their enemies off. At Crécy in 1346, dismounted men-at-arms and archers beat off repeated attacks by French cavalry, whose horses were a prime target for arrows. That same year this combination defeated a Scottish invasion at Neville's Cross near the city of Durham, but there was heavy pressure on the English centre and right until a mounted English reserve was brought up and caught the Scots by surprise, the victory made complete by the arrival of reinforcements. At Poitiers in 1356 a mounted reserve swung the battle for the English, who were hard pressed in their defensive array by dismounted Frenchmen. The reserves turned the battle round and King John himself was captured.



This late 15th-century depiction from Jean Froissart's *Chroniques* of the battle of Crécy on 26 August 1346 shows many elements of medieval armies, including archers, crossbowmen, foot soldiers and mounted knights. (Photo12/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

ARROWS VERSUS ARMOUR

Archers carried specialist arrows, bodkins with needle-pointed heads to punch through mail links, or armour-piercing heads perhaps tipped with steel to penetrate steel plates. Tests have shown that the spin of the arrow in flight enables the head, striking at right angles, to drill a hole into armour plate. The range at which an arrow was shot, as well as whether iron- or steel-tipped heads were used, would determine its potency. Most surviving oxidized red bodkins seem to be of iron, which tests suggest curl up when they strike plate. If they struck mail they would burst the rings apart as they went through, a serious threat to anyone in plate armour, exposing a mail gusset, for example, at the armpit. Crossbows were equally powerful although they did not employ bodkins. Handguns were also appearing in armies in the 15th century, though not in any great number at this period.

In 1351 at Saintes the French retained mounted wings of horse to try to break up the archers on the flanks, and retained this formation for the rest of the century. At Nogent-sur-Seine in 1359 they succeeded in breaking into the English formation of archers in this way, whereas the men-at-arms kept tightly packed.

The significance of English archers in the French theatre is shown by the defeat at Ardres in 1351, where Sir John Beauchamp, caught by a dismounted French force as he returned from a raid, lined a ditch and held them off until they came to close quarters and another force broke up the archers.

In 1345 an English relieving force under the Earl of Derby charged into a French siege camp before Auberoche, the archers and men-at-arms doing much damage, while a sortie from the garrison finally broke the French forces. This form of surprise attack would occur again at La Roche Derien in 1347 during the Breton War of Succession, when an English relieving force fell on the French siege camp at night.

After Poitiers there were no further major battles between England and France until Agincourt in 1415. It was not battles that won a country as much as hard sieges: the French generally refused to fight in the open, instead shutting themselves up in castles and fortified towns, and forcing the English to besiege them, or else wander the countryside.

With the Treaty of Bretigny in 1360 garrisons emptied, and groups of soldiers formed free companies under captains such as Sir Robert Knollys (perhaps the earliest) and Sir John Hawkwood. These 'rutters', as the English called them, or routiers, actually consisted of men from many nationalities, though the French often referred to them all as 'English'. Each company often consisted of only a few hundred men, archers, infantry and men-at-arms. A typical ploy was to seize one or two strong castles and use them as bases from which to terrorize an area. They hired their services out to rulers, and according to Froissart, the Black Prince used 12,000 of them in Castile. At the end of the 14th century they tended to disappear until their rebirth on a smaller scale after the renewal of war by Henry V.

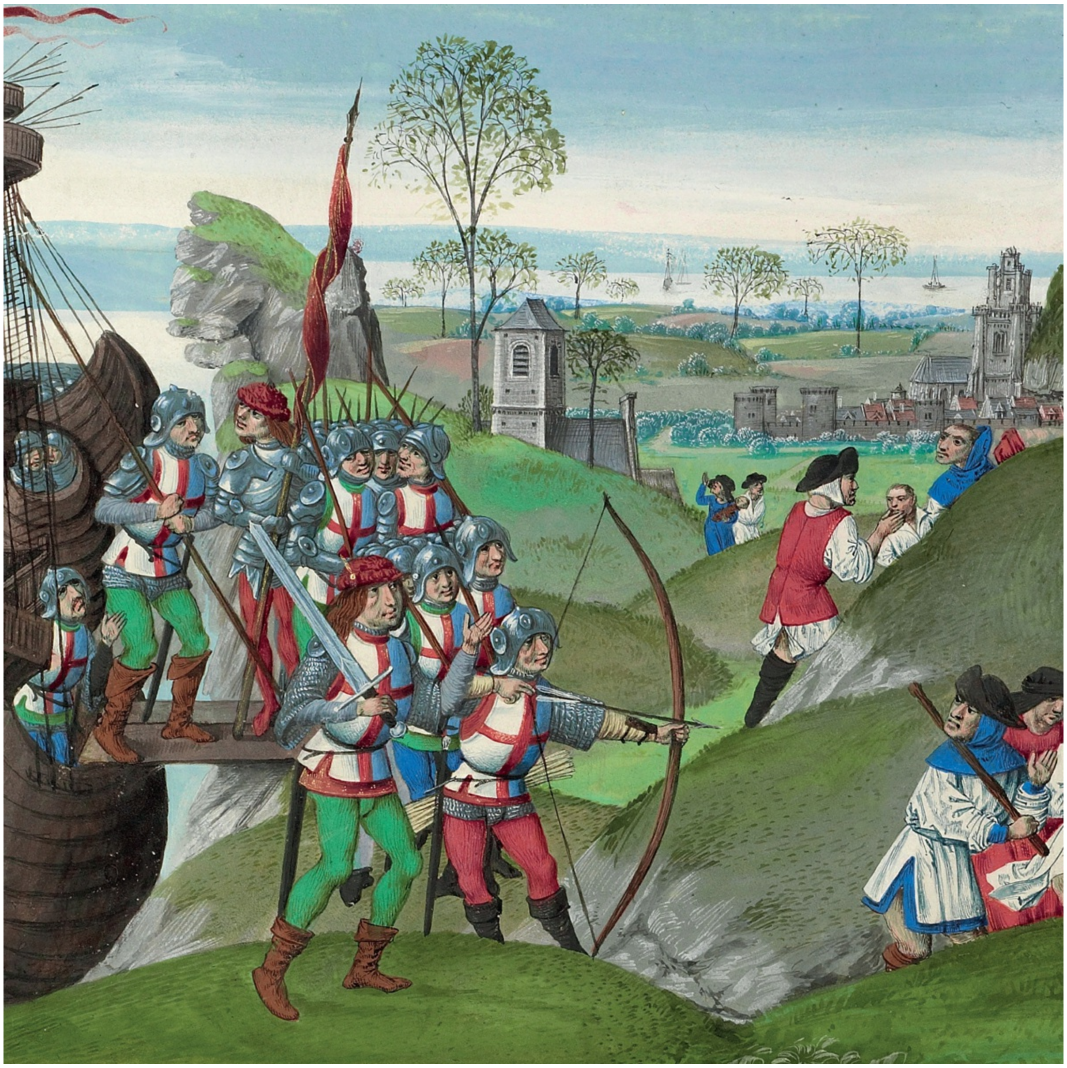
This square-sectioned iron crossbow quarrel was designed to have armour-piercing capability. It was found on the site of the battle of Towton, 1461. (The Portable Antiquities Scheme/The Trustees of the British Museum/CC BY-SA 2.0)

English forces were also involved in Spain. At Najera in 1367 the army of the Black Prince formed three entirely dismounted lines, the main battle in the centre, to face a Castilian force including many French soldiers, also in three lines but with many cavalry. The men-at-arms again fought well, ably supported by archers who out-ranged the Spanish javelin-wielding mounted *jinetes*. They also out-shot crossbowmen and slingers, who drew back, allowing the English men-at-arms to overlap the enemy division. When the English rearguard swung in on the flank, the Spanish and French lines shattered.

By the 15th century, the knight often fought on foot. He had been trained to fight mounted, with a lance, but it was often more effective to dismount most of the men-at-arms and to keep only a small mounted reserve. This was partly due to the increasing threat from missiles. In France during the early 15th century, the English forces used tactics learned the previous century. If the armoured fighting men were kept near the blocks of archers and all waited for the enemy to advance, it meant the latter arrived in a more tired state, all the while harassed by the arrows from the archers and compressed by a natural tendency to shy away from them. This bunching could then work to the advantage of the English who used their archers to strike at the press of French soldiers, now aggravated by those behind pushing forward, as happened at Agincourt. The groups of mounted men-at-arms who tried to outflank the archers at the start of the battle were foiled by the woods which protected each end of the English line, and found to their cost the price of facing archers when mounted.

Beaumaris castle in Anglesey, Wales, is one of the finest concentric castles, begun in 1295 by Edward I. It consists of two rings of walls, the inner being higher so that soldiers could shoot over the heads of those on the outer walls and support them if they were attacked. (Tom Parnell/CC BY-SA 2.0)

When archers were in a strong position, ideally defended by stakes, hedges or ditches, a cavalry charge was extremely dangerous. Even when the horses were protected by armour, there was always some exposed part that an arrow could strike, and arrows went deep. Shafts fitted with broad hunting heads made short work of flesh, and the horses became unmanageable even when not mortally wounded. The mounted knight then became useless as he fought for control or was thrown to the ground as the animal collapsed. It is worth noting that only a few hundred at each end of the French line attacked, and of these a few still reached the stakes despite the volleys of presumably thousands of arrows launched at them. Yet it was the dismounted men-at-arms who did most of the fighting in this battle, and it was they who, according to one chronicler, pushed the English line back a spear's length before everything became jammed up:

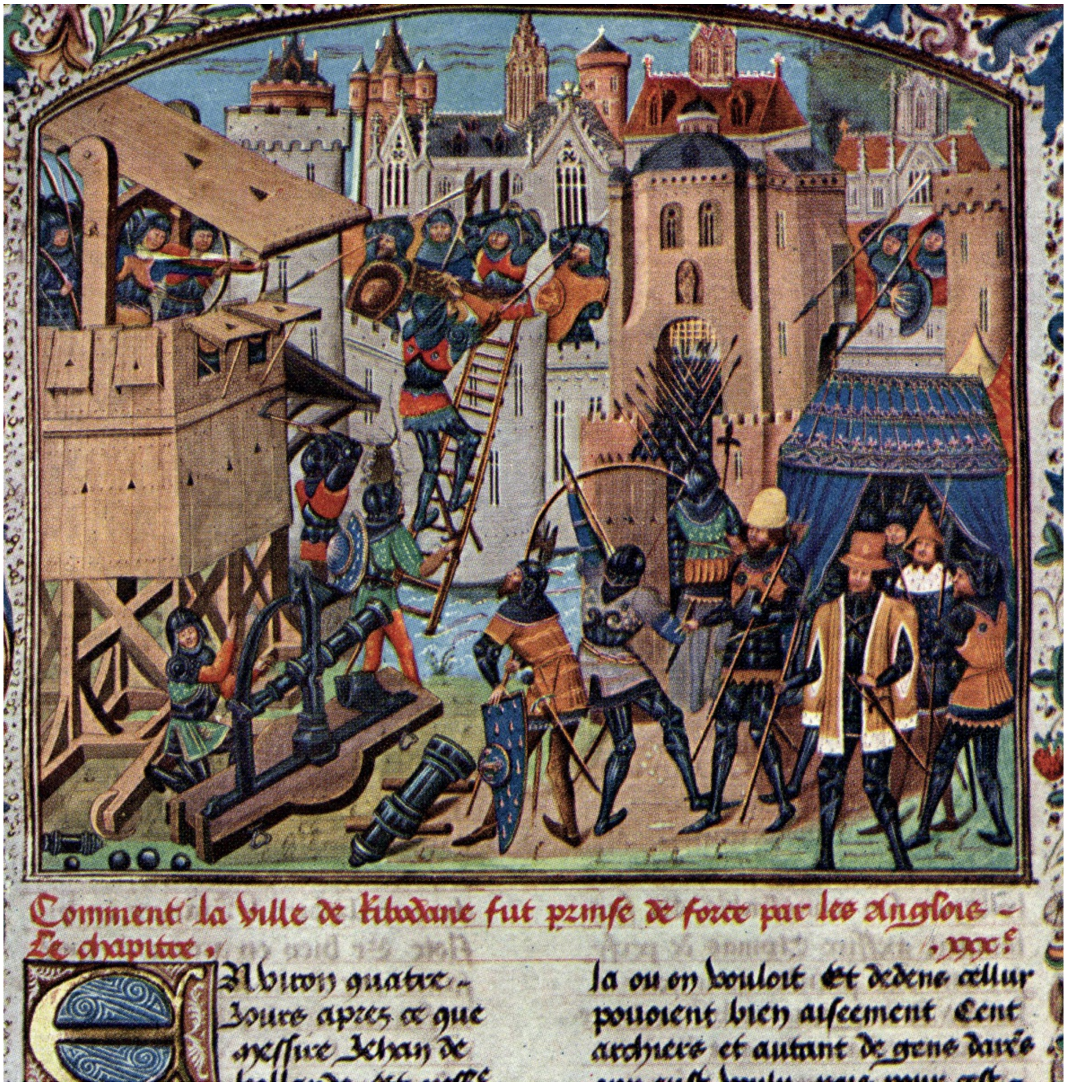


In 1372 a combined Genoese–Castilian fleet in French service took the port of La Rochelle back from the English, depicted in a Flemish manuscript of around 1480. Tight cloth jackets are worn with the red cross of St George; the legs are covered in woollen hose with a codpiece, as worn in civilian life. (Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program)

> But when the French nobility, who at first approached in full front, had nearly joined battle, either from fear of the arrows, which by their impetuosity pierced through the sides and bevors of their basinets, or that they might more speedily penetrate our ranks to the banners, they divided themselves into three troops, charging our line in three places where the banners were: and intermingling their spears closely, they assaulted our men with so ferocious an impetuosity, that they compelled them to retreat almost at spear's length.

Since plate armour obviated the need for a shield, and fighting dismounted meant the rein hand was free, it became common for knights on foot to carry a two-handed staff weapon in addition to the sword hanging at their side. At first this was often a lance cut down to a length of around 6–7ft (1.8–2.1m). Increasingly, other staff weapons were carried, which could deal more effectively with plate armour. One of the most popular was the pollaxe, designed to dent or crush the plates, either to wound the wearer or so damage the plates that they ceased to function properly.

Mounted men were very useful in a rout, for they could catch up a fleeing enemy and cut him down with minimum risk to themselves, especially if he was lightly armoured. Indeed, catching archers out of position was the best way for cavalry to scatter them before they got a chance to deploy. In the Hundred Years' War this was not too much of a problem for English knights, since the French did not use archers on a large scale. During the Wars of the Roses, archers fought on both sides in Yorkist and Lancastrian armies and, for the most part, the men-at-arms found it best to stick with the tried-and-trusted methods and fight on foot.


Comment la ville de Ribodane fut prinse de force par les Angloys –
Le chapitre. xxx.
Environ quatre jours apres ce que messire Jehan de
la ou on vouloit Et dedens celluy pouoient bien aiseement Cent archiers et autant de gens darmes

The English siege of Ribodane in France, illustrated in a later 15th-century manuscript of Froissart's chronicle. A siege tower allows archers to shoot down over the battlements, while cannon pound the defences and a ladder is used in an attempt to scale the battlements. (Rischgitz/Getty Images)

SIEGES

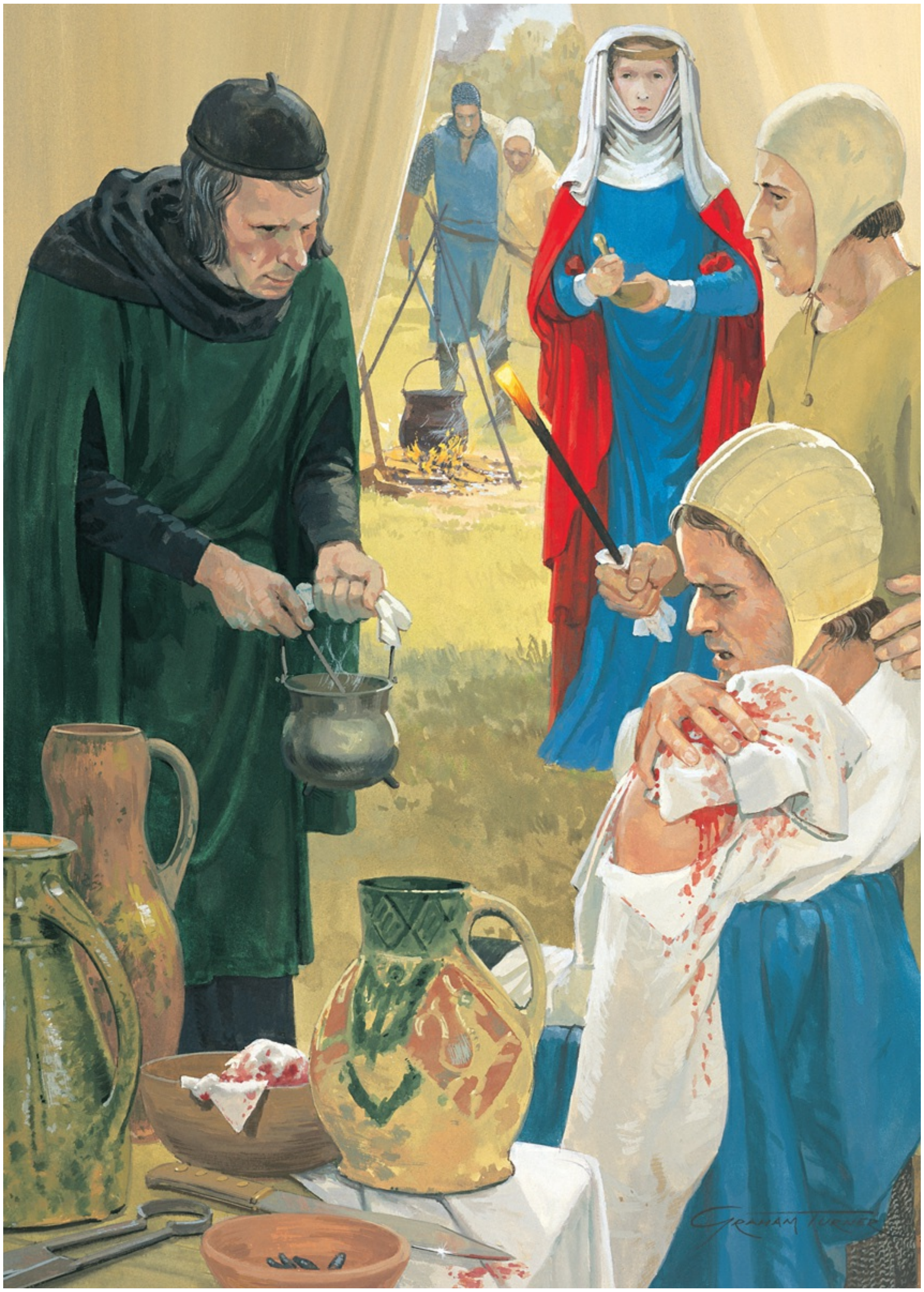
Sieges were more prevalent than set-piece battles. There was less worry of losing all in a single engagement, though a protracted siege was expensive and it became increasingly difficult to hold troops together. Great keeps, or donjons, were, by their size, difficult to take, as King John found at Rochester in 1215 when he arrived to confront the rebel barons. Having undermined a corner of the donjon, his men found the defenders still resisted for a time from behind the cross-wall inside. The siege lasted almost two months. By the end of the 13th century castles had perhaps reached their peak of development, as witness the imposing constructions of Edward I in Wales. Several of these, such as Harlech and Beaumaris, were of concentric form, with an inner and outer wall supporting one another all round, and with every defensive trick, such as arrow loops, overhanging wooden hoardings to command the base of the wall, and projecting mural towers to enfilade the wall and effectively cut it into separate sections that could be closed off if gained by an enemy.

But castles were not just for defence; they were bases for mounted knights who could ride out perhaps 10 miles and back in a day, or as temporary bases for royal troops to operate against rebels, or vice versa. Edward's Welsh strongholds were as much instruments of conquest as defended bases. Similarly castles provided fortified resting places for field forces, and their garrisons could be used to enlarge such a force. Harrying the lands of one's enemy was sometimes a prelude to a siege, and was a way to deny food, kill peasants and so his economy, and insult his lordship.

Sieges could be costly and involve much organization, sometimes drawing craftsmen from all over England, as that of Bedford by Henry III in 1224 shows. The king summoned much of the kingdom's resources, with carpenters, miners, stone-cutters and quarriers brought to the scene together with all sorts of equipment, such as timber, ropes and tallow for siege engines. We also glimpse the necessary luxuries of the lords: as well as his armour, King Henry's tents were sent by cart from London, together with comforts such as wine, pepper, almonds, cinnamon, saffron and ginger.

Yet the real business was dangerous. Lord Richard de Argentan was hit in the stomach by a crossbow bolt that went through his armour, and six other knights were killed. It took four assaults, each time advancing further into the castle, before the defenders yielded. Quarter was usually given if a place surrendered but was in the gift of the besiegers if a castle was taken by force. At Bedford the garrison had already been excommunicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and King Henry, angry at the resistance he had met in a siege lasting eight weeks, hung William de Bréauté outside the gates with his knights. As a note of leniency he did, however, allow them to be absolved of their excommunication. At Rochester, too, John seems to have wanted to hang the garrison, until it was pointed out that this might prompt other rebels to do the same to royal garrisons.

Perhaps the most celebrated siege in 13th-century England was that of Kenilworth in 1266, when supporters of Simon de Montfort took refuge there after their leader's death at Evesham. The siege by Henry III and the Lord Edward lasted six months and only ended on terms of surrender. Mining was impossible because of the wide water defences. As well as using siege towers and catapults, several attacks were launched by knights on the siege lines, causing much damage and loss of life. This was one reason knights were important to the defence of a castle. Yet food was equally important, and lack of provisions was a major reason the defenders asked for a truce, saying that if no help came in 40 days, they would surrender. They were then allowed to march out with full military honours. Without water defences, mines posed a deadly threat.



MEDICAL SERVICES, 13TH CENTURY: The chances of receiving decent attention when wounded depended very much on status and luck.

When Edward III arrived before Calais in 1346 he found the defences so daunting that he built a second town of wooden huts, shops and streets. English ships cut off supplies by sea but supplied the besiegers. Edward allowed 1,700 poor people through and even gave them a meal, before the lines closed. Calais was finally starved into submission; six rich citizens came out to be executed but were saved by Edward’s queen.

Clever tricks sometimes worked. At the French siege of La Rochelle in 1372 the mayor showed the English garrison commander Philip Mansel an old letter with the seal of Edward III which, the mayor said, ordered Mansel to parade in the square next morning. Mansel was illiterate and believed him. The mayor also promised to provide all the soldiers’ back pay. When the English garrison paraded, the French cut off their route back to the castle and forced their surrender.

As always, disease posed a threat: dysentery attacked Henry V’s army besieging Harfleur in 1415, and at Meaux in 1421 he contracted probably the same disease, which killed him the following year. By the 15th century, catapults were being replaced by cannon but, unlike in some areas of Europe, there were no major changes in fortification design to meet this new threat. Moreover, there were relatively few sieges during the Wars of the Roses.

Although in siege warfare, engineers in charge of machines, and latterly gunners with new-fangled cannon, were as important as the knight, knights were still needed for escort duty, for forays to lay waste surrounding countryside and procure food, or for an attack should a mine or machine collapse a wall, or should ladders or siege tower be required. In captured strongholds they helped to provide the garrison.

FIELD MEDICINE, DEATH AND BURIAL

Knights who were injured or sick faced two obstacles on any road to recovery. First, dependent on their rank, they might or might not get the chance to see a surgeon. Second, if they did get medical attention, a great deal depended on the quality of the physician and the nature of the wound. The king and the great nobles would have surgeons in their pay and such men would travel with their master when they were on the move. Thomas Morestede is styled as the King’s Surgeon in his agreement with Henry V for the invasion of France in 1415, where he is also to provide three archers and 12 ‘*hommes de son mestier*’ (men of his service). In addition, William Bradwardyn is listed as a surgeon and both he and Morestede came with nine more surgeons each, making a total of 20 for the army. Some surgeons were retained by indenture in the same way as the soldiers. John Paston, who was hit below the right elbow by an arrow during the battle of Barnet in 1471, managed to escape with other fleeing Yorkists but lost his baggage. His brother sent a surgeon who stayed with him and used his 'leechcraft' and 'physic' until the wound was on the mend, though John complained it cost £5 in a fortnight and he was broke.

The medical care itself was a mixture of skill and luck, since astrology and the doctrine of humours played a large part in medical care. Surgeons of repute were taught at the school of Montpellier in the Languedoc-Roussillon region of southern France, but even these men would have had limited skills. Many could treat broken legs or dislocations successfully, even hernias, and carried out amputations, though a lack of knowledge of bacteria made it a risky business for the patient. Some used alcohol, opium or mandragora to dull the pain. Neither instruments nor hands were necessarily washed. Open wounds could be treated by stitching, and egg yolks were recognized as a soothing balm. However, blood flow was staunched by the use of a hot iron.

Arrows might go deep, though by the 15th century it was less common to be hit by one with a head bearing barbs, especially when wearing armour. Yet arrows were often stuck in the ground for swift reloading, and conveyed on their tips a lethal dose of dirt which, together with cloth fragments, would be carried into the wound. Abdominal wounds were usually fatal, and surgery in this area was fairly lethal, since any tear in the gut would allow material into the abdominal cavity (not to mention dirt from the weapon used), resulting in peritonitis and death. However, skeletons from the battle of Towton in 1461 show that men did survive quite horrendous wounds. Bones show evidence of slashing blows which bit through muscle into the bone itself, in some cases shearing off pieces. One individual in particular had been in battle before, having been struck across the jaw with such force that the blade cut across to the other side of the mouth. He also had wounds to the skull, but survived all of these, with some disfigurement, to face action once more at Towton, knowing what that might entail – in this instance his own death. Although knights might wear better armour, it was (theoretically) their job to lead from the front. Some unfortunate knights neither escaped nor perished, but were left for dead, robbed and left half-naked in the open unless by chance they were discovered and succoured.

Much of the Towton evidence comes from men who were infantry. Compression of the left arm bones strongly suggests that some were almost certainly longbowmen. They appear to have been killed during the rout or after capture, and some have several wounds, especially to the head, suggesting that once cut down, further blows were delivered to finish them off. Presumably they had no helmet, or had discarded or lost it while being pursued. The victims were then placed in grave pits. Knights and men of rank might escape such a fate. After Agincourt, the Duke of York's body was boiled and the bones brought back to England for burial. Similarly those of lords would be found either by their retainers or else by heralds, whose job it was to wander the field and book the dead (meaning those with coats-of-arms), which gave the victor a good indication of how he had fared. The families would then transport the body back to be buried on home ground, in the case of the nobility next to their ancestors. Otherwise they were buried locally, usually in a churchyard.

During the turmoil of the Wars of the Roses, with men supporting rivals to the throne, treason was an easy and swift charge to bring. For example, after the battle of Wakefield in 1460, Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, was captured and executed next day. Men of rank killed while in revolt might also undergo the degradation of public humiliation. This was not common during the first part of the 15th century, since much of the time knights fought in France, where they were usually treated as honourable opponents. Warwick the Kingmaker, however, having been slain at Barnet in 1471, was brought to London and displayed for all to see, before his body was allowed to rest at Bisham Abbey with other family members. Richard III was exposed for two days in the Church of St Mary in the Newarke in Leicester, naked except for a piece of cloth, and then buried in a plain tomb in the house of the Grey Friars nearby. Salisbury's head, with those of the Duke of York and his young son, the Earl of Rutland, both killed at Wakefield, was stuck on a spike on the walls of York, the Duke's complete with a paper crown.

Being treated to the indignity of having one's head spiked on London Bridge or on other town gates served as a warning to all those passing beneath. However, a number of attainders (loss of civil rights following a sentence for treason) were reversed, such as that of Sir Richard Tunstall who, despite being placed in the Tower, managed to persuade Edward IV that he was more use alive and gained his favour. Children of those who died accused of treason did not usually suffer because of it, though their father's lands might pass to the crown until they inherited them.

In contrast to this brutality, there is evidence that humanity and regret did exist. Chantry chapels were set up on various battlefields to pray for the souls of those who died, for example at Barnet, some half a mile (800m) from the town, where the corpses were buried. Richard III endowed Queen's College, Cambridge, for prayers to be said for those of his retinue who perished at Barnet and Tewkesbury. Nobles might make provision for men of their retinues to be cared for if wounded; Henry of Northumberland told his executors to carry out such wishes if he should be killed at Bosworth.

THE END OF THE KNIGHT

Knighthood is alive and well, though in a very different form from medieval times. Even through the 300 years covered by this book it had gone from a social rank held by hard-riding warriors to one held by men versed in court etiquette, many of whom never saw real action. The image portrayed by the literary figures of the time might be inspirational, but there were many who ignored chivalric ideals unless dealing with men of equal rank, and sometimes not even then.

The very ethos of the armoured man on horseback with his lance had, over the centuries, come crashing into ignominious failure time and again across Europe. The French were plagued by English arrows at numerous encounters and soon realized that charging longbowmen head on with mounted knights was madness. Ordinary Flemish footmen crushed mounted French knights at Courtrai with their fearful maces. The hedgehogs of Scottish and Flemish pikemen proved a formidable obstacle to mounted men but the latter could be a useful cover for their own horsemen. The Swiss had made a name for themselves with their pikes and lethal halberds, creating a form of warfare which was taken up by Germans and soon became widespread across Europe. Added to that, the technology of guns and gunpowder was improving and would prove a significant addition to the battlefield. The German knights were flayed by artillery and handguns during the Hussite Wars of the 15th century. Bulletproof armour could be worn, but it was heavier than normal armour as the metal had to be thickened or given extra layers.

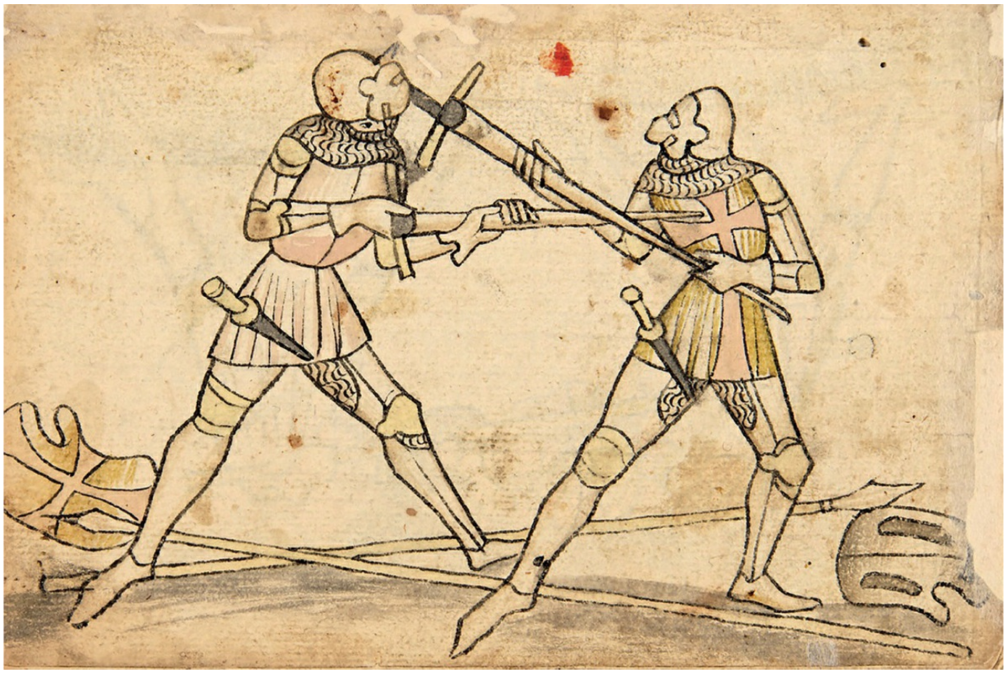
The weight meant that it tended to be reserved for the protection of vital areas. Bullets might still punch through limb armour and cause severe wounds, while mobile field guns on the battlefield could do more damage: one such caused the Earl of Arundel to lose a foot and subsequently die. Moreover, the knightly lance could not get through the massed ranks of even longer pikes. Vulnerable to gunfire, ineffective against the massed pikeheads, the *raison d'être* of the knight on the battlefield was placed in question. By the 17th century the armoured knight also faced lighter, pistol-wielding cavalry. By the opening battle of the English Civil Wars the heavily armoured horsemen, not necessarily knights, were seen to be a relic of the past and bowed out from the scene. It was obvious that the title itself now meant little in warfare except to denote a man of breeding and training, usually one of the officers in the army. Already in the mid-15th century Jean de Bueil in *Le Jouvencel* saw that it was the training and efficiency of the soldier that was the key to military success, not some chivalric glory. The knight as the great armoured steam-roller scything through infantry was a memory.

Similarly, the knight's traditional home, the castle, declined in importance during the 14th and 15th centuries. The defensive qualities of a fortress such as Bodiam in Sussex, for example, have been questioned and few castles played a major part in the Wars of the Roses. Even when gunpowder arrived in the 14th century, English castles showed little in the way of major development, unlike those seen in some Continental countries. The more stable conditions in England contributed to the decline of the castle in the later Middle Ages, with knights increasingly preferring to live most of the time in their private houses.

Cruelty and brutality were evident even among princes of chivalry, against those people who were not members of the 'club', the ordinary men, women and children of a defeated populace. Tempers frayed during long sieges, too. In the 15th century the older ideal of courtly love had essentially been replaced by the view that love prevented the knight from doing his job. When peace descended, knighting itself might be waived; the unrest of the Hundred Years' War in France tempted knights to take advantage of the weak. In Germany many knights were poor and similarly turned to robbery, also citing their right to private war. Despite the best efforts of the church, chivalry was a concept that sat more easily on some shoulders than on others. Various writers strove to inspire the fighting elite with stirring tales such as Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, where the emphasis lay on moral values.

Increasingly men aspiring to knighthood might not have lineage going back generations, which in some areas of Europe had been a prerequisite. Some now hailed from free peasant stock, such as Sir John Paston, grandson of a peasant educated so well in law that he had become a justiciar. Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier,* published in 1528, was a study of the new gentleman, a man no longer interested in chivalry but who wanted to know how to make a good life for himself. Though Italian, Castiglione's work was read widely. The new men learned about art and found a calling not on the battlefield but at court, working for the now rising state.

The rank of knight never died out, of course, any more than did that of esquire. The old connection with the 'shield bearer' (the literal translation of the latter) was long gone but the 'country squire' still denoted a man of standing in the community. The word itself, however, was increasingly debased until it became no more than a courtesy title given to all and sundry, as seen on personal correspondence today. By contrast, the title of knight retained its message of standing and service. It was Elizabeth I who ended the tradition that any knight could create another and made it solely the preserve of the monarch, which it has remained. Now the rank is awarded for service to one's country, yet the ritual dubbing with a sword, which replaced the original buffet, must still be done to seal the contract. Ranks of knighthood vary, from the knight bachelor to the prestigious Orders such as the Garter, founded in 1348, or the Bath, which was revived under Queen Victoria. The bestowal of knighthood does not now rely on a person's background status nor technically on his wealth; rather it is a public declamation of his achievements. The great horse may have gone but the rank still proclaims the man.



A German illustration from the 15th-century manual teaching fighting positions, the *Codex Wallerstein*, showing fighting knights wearing rondel daggers as back-up weapons. (Codex Wallerstein/Public Domain)

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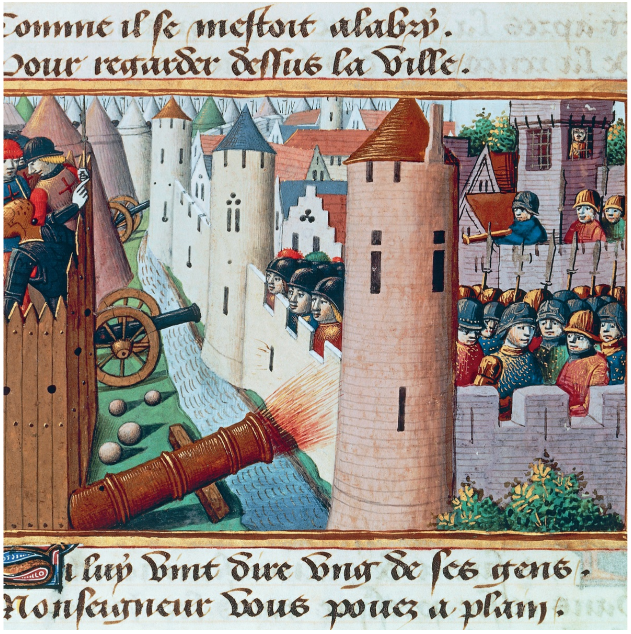
omme il ſe meſtoit alabry .
Pour regarder deſſus la Ville .
i luy vint dire ung de ſes gens .
Monſeigneur vous povez a plain .

The siege of Orléans by the English in 1428–29, shown in a miniature from the vigils of Charles VII, depicting the use of several cannon. Improvements in guns and gunpowder, new styles of fighting and the professionalization of war began the steady but sure decline of the armoured, chivalrous knight and the emergence of a new kind of warfare.

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Front cover and title page: A helmet made in Augsburg in 1490–92 for emperor Maximilian I. By the late fifteenth century, the armourer's metal-working skill had reached its zenith, and German and Italian armours were prized by the wealthiest English knights. (DeAgostini/Getty Images)

Text compiled by Chris McNab.

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